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HER FIRST ADVENTURE

BY

EGBERT G. ROE

AUTHOR OF MISS MYSTIC OF HARLEM; A PROFESSIONAL
SECRET; A COUNTRY COUSIN, ETC.

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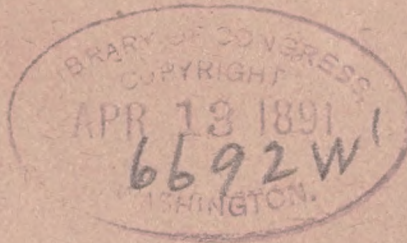
FIRST ADVENTURE

A METAPHYSICAL NARRATIVE

BY

Egbert G. Roe

Author of *Miss Mystic of Harlem*; *A Professional Secret*; *A Country Cousin*, Etc.



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PREFACE.

From the *Buffalo News*.

The whereabouts of the young and beautiful daughter of the millionaire lumber merchant at Black Rock, whose disappearance under somewhat peculiar circumstances was referred to in these columns some days ago, have, it has been ascertained, been discovered and the discovery in question only serves to heighten the mystery in an already decidedly mysterious case. The young lady, it is asserted on good authority, has been traced to a cottage in the outskirts of the city where she is living as the wife of one John Woolson, a hunchback, until recently employed as night clerk in Kemble's drug store. Whatever can have led this young woman of beauty, wealth and social position to such a step is more than a mystery to all her friends, especially as the hunchback bridegroom is of almost repulsive personality. The father of the girl is beside himself with rage and grief and is said to have determined to discard her.

"Is not this an extraordinary case?" I asked, turning to my friend, the eminent Dr. T——, and handing him the paper.

He read the item slowly.

"Strange, yes," he answered, handing me back the paper; "but the case is by no means an isolated one."

"Do you mean to say that you have ever come across such an instance before?" I exclaimed.

"Most assuredly I have. Why, my dear fellow, old-time fable and modern story alike furnish instances of the beautiful, the sweet and the good succumbing beneath the influence of some wondrous, mystical, uncanny spell to beings their moral and physical opposites. In legendary story have we not the chronicle of the barbaric ruler's mate, who stole away from the splendors of the royal banqueting hall and the side of her imperial lover to seek the rude hovel and debased companionship of a hideous, repulsive serf?"

"But how do you account for anything of the kind?"

"Account for it! Well, in these later years it has come to be more than half conceded that there exists a certain subtle power, a certain mysterious force which science has as yet been able to only very indefinitely define and determine, and which power it is possible for some beings to exert over others. Science, justly conservative, wisely cautious, has been slow to concede the existence of this mystic power, but is fast being forced to the admission under the overwhelming pressure of a grim line of facts. Who shall tell how great an influence this as yet uncomprehended force has exerted and continues daily to exert over human lives?"

"Can it be possible that any such occult forces have sway in these matter-of-fact days?" I involuntarily exclaimed.

The doctor pointed to the paper still lying across my knee.

"You have the answer to that question there," he replied.

There was a moment's silence between us, and then the doctor again spoke.

"You asked me just now," he said, in a low and somewhat unsteady voice, "if I had ever known of a similar instance. I have, and it was indeed a most striking one. Come to my house this evening and you shall hear about it."

In accordance with the appointment thus made I called upon my friend, and in the form of a copious bundle of notes, duly authenticated in various important particulars, I came into possession of the facts upon which I have based this story of "Her First Adventure."

As I was about to leave that night, the doctor stopped me on the threshold.

"I wish to say one thing more to you," he said, impressively. "I wish to bear testimony to one conviction—a conviction that grows stronger in me with the passage of time, and which I know I shall carry down with me unshaken to the grave. It is this: That in physical beauty and sweetness of soul, I shall never find one who will surpass her whom I have referred to in these notes as—Margaret Beale."

My friend, the eminent scientist, turned from me almost abruptly; not so quickly, though,

that I failed to detect a certain moisture in his eyes.

Was there yet something more to this story than he had told me—something in which his personal emotions played, or once had played, a part?

Who knows?

THE AUTHOR.

HER FIRST ADVENTURE.

CHAPTER I.

THE PROFANING TOUCH.

“HOW would you do it?”

“By the power of love!”

“What, *you*?”

As she spoke the girl looked down pityingly upon the strange human deformity at her side. He had fastened his eyes upon her neck and shoulders, bared for evening fashion. He was repulsive to her.

“Well! if not by love—then because I *will* it.”

“You would hypnotize her?” she asked scornfully.

“Women obey me always!”

They were standing at the extreme end of a fashionable salon, frequented by artists, actors, poets and the shifting and shiftless personalities of metropolitan Bohemia. The rooms were crowded and according to a custom of these weekly gatherings, people spoke to each other as they happened to rub shoulders in the crowd.

The young girl laughed nervously at what she believed the mock earnestness of his tone until she glanced down again and saw somewhere about the level of her waist, a head, so close to her that it threatened to canopy its ugliness in the draperies of her gown. Instinctively her propriety was shocked by this threatened contact with such a human head. Her hand fell to her side, to protect the soft mousseline; a delicate, frail shield. In doing so her fingers inadvertently brushed against this head, and the bushy hair seemed to coil and twine clingingly about them, causing her nerves to tremble as under the influence of a magnetic touch.

She started to withdraw, when her hand was seized; lips were pressed against the soft, white skin. She tried to drag her hand away, but strength was denied her. Her arm seemed numb, powerless.

The lips, not satisfied, crept to her wrist and then her arm.

She looked around her beseechingly, a little helplessly, but the people had their backs to her. They were listening to a famous violinist, who, to the accompaniment of a piano, was teaching his instrument to pray as no human heart has ever done in the "Ave Maria." Anticipating the pleasures of this musical treat, she had chosen an obscure corner so that the semi-gloom might assist her reveries; so that the figures of fashion

about her would be mere shadows of a world she might forget, to follow this musical prayer.

She realized that the creature at her side had foreseen this advantage and he could easily hide behind the full draperies of her skirt should anyone turn suddenly upon them.

Her mental purity, until that minute unquestioned, wavered in the scales that weigh woman's future. The balance of the body and the soul.

Which would outweigh the other? The Body or the Soul?

Ave Maria—Ave Maria gracia plena, sang the violin and without temptation, she would have followed the prayer. It would have made her stronger in her recollections of the convent school which the chant suggested, brought stronger to her the spirit of the Holy Mother.

At that moment, however, prayer became a mere idolatry. The senses were her God.

From Paganism came Christianity. In the flesh was born the soul.

She rebelled against the man! She was devoured by his caress.

"Oh! How dare you!" she gasps, while the last notes of the Ave Maria die away and she leans exhausted, languid, her eyes half-closed, against the wall.

The applause was earnest and prolonged. Every one present had yielded to the enchantment of the music, and she, who among them

all loved music better than anything else in the world had forgotten it in the presence of a pagan idol, a deformed, hideous cripple.

Taking advantage of the noise he looked up at her with a dangerous, wicked sparkle in his dark brown eyes and said as he released her hand—

“You see I have magnetic power!”

“I hate you—go away from me,” she murmured and fascinated still beyond her power by the strange evil gleam in his dark eyes she stared at him—while he smiled with cynical indifference and moved away from her across the room.

“Robert,” a voice calls him, just as he gets beyond her hearing.

He turned and hobbled back to greet his friend.

“Is that you, Hunter?”

“I have a letter for you, from a woman, I think; don’t be afraid. I have not recognized the handwriting.”

“No? I am surprised at that. I am glad that there is one not known to you. I hope she is to me, also. Some one who has not dined and wined us, or to whom we have not extended equal gratification in the last month! Fact is, Hunter, if we can’t find some new people to enjoy our dinners with, I shall give up eating.”

Hunter looked at his friend gravely a moment, then said:

"I believe it is impossible for you to enjoy a dinner, unless a pretty woman is smiling at you between mouthfuls."

"I own the charm of their companionship improves terrapin immensely. I have a supreme contempt for the man who sits day after day in the front room of Delmonico's and eats alone. He is either a gourmand or—"

"Or what?" asked Hunter.

"Or married," replied the cynic.

Robert Van Kever with a semi-leap, cat-like in motion, awkward in pose, got into the depths of a huge cushioned chair, and opened the letter. He looked at the signature.

"It is from a woman, but a stupid one. She is a prude," he said, and a pause followed during which Hunter waited to hear the contents of the letter.

"Ah! it concerns you, Hunter. It is from Miss Atwood, and she has found the only woman to play 'Princess Zelda' in your new drama."

Hunter took the letter as Van Kever handed it to him and the latter continued.

"Clever, that Atwood girl. It must be a difficult thing to find a woman who can interpret tragedy properly. They're all soubrettes by nature in New York."

"Awfully good of you to interest yourself, Robert; you must have written her about it."

"Yes! The performance is for charity. One

has to do something in these matters, especially when it is under the auspices of such fashionable fads as Mrs. Courtlandt Van Roosevelte and Mrs. Beauchamp Thompson. Does she name the young actress?"

"Yes. Miss Margaret Beale." Van Kever's eyes looked up keenly, suspiciously at Hunter.

"Do you know her?" asked the dramatist.

"I saw her to-night for the first time."

"Is she here?"

"Yes; the girl over yonder, talking to the big, blonde woman, Miss Tokis."

"She looks very young!" remarked the dramatist, gravely.

"Buds bloom rapidly, sometimes," replied Van Kever, slowly following unconsciously his own thoughts.

"The letter states she has just arrived in New York from a year's visit in Boston."

"Fresh from an occult tuition," continued Van Kever, watching Margaret Beale with his eyes. "Does she picture the part?"

"Perfectly. She is tall, lithe, supple. Her face is sad, her eyes dreamy, and then," continued the dramatist, weighing his heroine critically, "there is a suggestion of unawakened passion. The slim waist, the insinuating curve of the hips, the smooth flesh tints of the neck, the sinuous grace of motion. She is like a swan taking her first dip in a new pond. See how she

defies the admiration of the Cuban at her side. She is an exploiter, not a flirt."

And does your princess only exploit?" asked Van Kever. If that be the case, "your drama will be tame."

"No; I deal with a social crime!"

"Marriage?"

"Yes; without an altar."

"You think that's new?"

"Under the conditions of my play, I do!"

"What are the conditions?"

A union of the senses. A girl's surrender to a magnetic spell—a battle between mind and matter."

"A love story, eh?" asked Van Kever indifferently.

"No. Virtue meets vice and against her will virtue yields—because vice is cunning and stronger in mind. He casts a spell about her, and tells her it is love."

"She accepts the mask, eh?"

"In this respect, that she mistakes passion for love, dishonor for religion. She thinks it is a just and delicious fate."

Your Herve—Vice—is an old magician."

"In a new dress!"

"Instead of a long beard and spangled gown?"

"Hypnotic malice!" answered the dramatist, earnestly.

"Hypnotism—hypnotism," cried Van Kever,

while his eyes assumed a strange brilliancy. "I think Miss Beale will make a success of Princess Zelda."

"As to that, who can tell. She lacks experience and I understand has no past, no love affair from which to draw the sentiments of the play."

"I think I can help you," said Van Kever, clutching nervously at the playwright's sleeve. "I will test her for you here, to-night."

"How?"

"I will hypnotize her."

"If she will consent."

"I have already asked her."

"What did she say?"

Van Kever slipped out of his chair, and ignoring Hunter's question crossed the room. In a low voice he murmured to himself:

"She shall tell me if she has ever loved."

CHAPTER II.

TESTING THE SPELL.

"WILL no one consent to aid me in the experiment?"

The lights had been lowered, and as Van Kever uttered these words his dwarf figure stepped to the centre of the grand *salon*, while all eyes were upon him. In stature he was little

over four feet. The dim light cast shadows about him, but the deformed shoulders and the hunchback were the material shadows of a cripple. His chest was thrown up high, out of all human proportion; the throat was full and muscular as that of a strong man. The legs were short and bowed, and the feet large, ungainly. The arms were long and powerful, the hands small, delicate almost as a woman's.

The face as a whole was any man's; it would have passed as an attractive one allied to a natural body, but set in such a crooked frame it was repulsive, with its deep wrinkles around the eyes and mouth.

The low, broad forehead was lined with signs of premature age, or vice, and the hair carelessly worn, was thick and black and made the head seem too large for the body.

It was a face calculated at first to repel, and yet again a certain determined force in the firm chin and square jaw might attract; a face apart from the body, above it in intellectual force, yet vicious and sour in expression, perhaps at the forced penalty of an alliance with its earth-shape.

The lips were thin, determined, and the eyes! ah! therein lay the charm.

Eyes such as some beautiful eastern woman might have had;—splendid, brown, changing eyes, with soft, fathomless depths. Their lashes

grew long, as a child's, and fell thickly, as though to hide the lines beneath, telling of the worn out love, exhausted passion, and the vice that make up a horrible routine in the life of a man who lives only for his senses.

Yet Robert Van Kever had more in him than the ordinary voluptuary could boast. A spice of combativeness, and an intense will-power made him an intelligent, far-seeing man of business, whose brain had been the motive power of many a thriving enterprise, greatly to the surprise of his friends, who had prognosticated his failure in life.

There was a story in his face. How easy to read these face-stories; their lines are plain enough. Yet these men believe them hidden from all the world.

Some minutes passed. The figure remained motionless.

"Have you any preference?" asked a sly young tenor, who leaned over a chair near where the hostess sat.

"None!" answered the dwarf.

His voice, usually high pitched, yet weak, now assumes a deep, harsh sound. He has fixed his eyes upon a statuette of Minerva placed in a corner at the extreme end of the salon.

"Will you make her speak?" asks a lady near by, referring to the statue.

"Yes—she shall speak."

He makes strange passes in the air with his hands, then stamping his foot, and bringing his fist forcibly down upon the table, he cries imperiously :

“Come here !”

Slowly edging her way among the people, jostling them aside almost rudely in her anxiety to reach the centre of the ring, comes a beautiful young woman.

There is a murmur of surprise and dissent as the girl stops at a motion of the dwarf's hand, and with her eyes wide open looks into his unceasingly.

“What a picture !” whispers Hunter to a woman seated next to him. “I shall have to introduce a dwarf in Princess Zelda.”

“Who is she ?” murmurs another.

“She is a stranger at these receptions.”

The dwarf hears the remark, and addressing the subject of his mesmerism, says to her :

“You are a princess. What do you wish for above all things in the world !”

The young girl sways a little, her face grows strangely pale. Leading her gently to a sofa, the dwarf motions her to rest upon it. No sooner is she seated, than her hand is extended as if some one had asked for it, while she says slowly :

“A true and honest lover.”

“Poor thing ! she must be very young,” whis-

pers a fashionable butterfly who has been married twice.

"Would you marry him?" asks the dwarf, unctiously.

The girl makes no answer. Her head falls back upon the cushions, and her hands are clasped as if in prayer.

"He is here in these rooms to-night?" continues Van Kever, creeping close to the sofa, and fixing his eyes more steadily upon her.

She bows her head.

The dwarf glances around him with a certain defiance in his eyes, and raising his hand points with his finger at a certain well-known physician—Dr. Werner—in silence.

The girl seizes Van Kever's coat sleeve and tries to drag him toward her.

"What do you want?" asks the dwarf, roughly.

She makes no answer, but raising herself gradually from the lounge, her arm creeps to the dwarf's shoulder, then around his neck.

"I think the test is sufficient," says Dr. Werner, coming toward Van Kever.

"Can you control it?"

There is a wicked smile upon the dwarf's ugly face as he speaks.

The physician walks over and whispers to the hostess; several ladies leave the room.

"Come, Van Kever, you will betray yourself," whispers Hunter.

The dwarf suddenly realizes that the entertainment is not agreeable to his audience. He shakes the girl's arm from his shoulder, and seizing her hand, his lips close to hers, whispers the one question he has not dared to speak before them all:

"Whom do you love?"

"You!"

"Have you ever loved before?"

"No; you are the first."

"Mrs. Rousby requests that you do not prolong the seance," says Dr. Werner, sternly, his eyes fixed on the girl.

"You know this young lady?" asks the dwarf.

The physician does not answer.

"Come, come," cries Van Kever, in quick, sharp tones, at the same time snapping his fingers. The girl wakes as if from a long sleep.

"I am satisfied, she is now your charge," and so saying the dwarf disappears into the ante-room and putting on his coat, hurries out. He enters his carriage at the door.

"Where to, sir?" asks Johnson, his valet.

"To Central Park!"

The valet hesitates. It is a strange hour for a drive.

"Did you hear me! Leave the windows down; I want the air. Drive on."

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST VISIT.

MARGARET BEALE was staying with her friend, Leda Atwood, in Fifty-Seventh Street. It had been against the latter's advice that she had attended Mrs. Rousby's reception. It was a place where one ran against queer people. The men were a fast lot; the women all had a past. They were all unquestionably clever, liberal in their philosophies, and as a whole these receptions had become famous as the only rendezvous in New York that approached the much talked of *salons* abroad.

It was not the place for a young girl, however, to make her first social plunge.

Mrs. Jack Rousby was a noted literary woman, with a generous hospitality and a knack for entertaining that had made her very popular. Her "punch" was delicious and not intoxicating.

Men dropped in there on one evening each week at any time till two in the morning. Famous singers, actors, artists and poets made it a point to be presented to Mrs. Rousby, because her rooms were generally full of journalists.

Margaret Beale had heard about her, and when Dr. Werner agreed under protest to show her this kingdom of Bohemia in New York, she went.

Some days had passed since the scene described in the last chapter.

It was a cold, cheerless morning; the rain beat angrily against the windows.

Only vaguely could Margaret Beale recall the circumstances of Van Kever's test. She felt that her nature had received a shock. She was unable to forget his face. She had not spoken of it afterwards; neither had Dr. Werner mentioned it to her friends.

Leda Atwood had been left in charge of the house, while her sister was enjoying the gayeties of Lenox.

She was busy over a delicately bound notebook of household accounts, when the door of the bed-room opened slowly.

"May I come in, dear?"

"Certainly."

Margaret Beale entered quietly and looked at the ruddy, welcoming fire.

"Do you know I've been here one week to-day?" she began. When she spoke there was an odd little hesitation in her speech, such as some children have.

"Eight days ago I left Boston. Oh, how nice it is to be here!" "Leda, this room is lovely. You give a room your individuality before you've been in it an hour. I know you did when you visited us at my home."

She stood before the open fire, and looked at the book in her friend's hand.

"Am I bothering you?" she asked.

"No! I must get Jack to do this for me. What's the use of a brother-in-law if not for just such unpleasant duties. They ought to expect it. Brothers do. I'll ask Jack this evening, if he isn't cross. I wish we could live without men."

"Well, I can for one," Margaret said, as she drew her soft, gray drapery about her and sat on a stool at her friend's feet.

She was not as tall as Miss Atwood, and not so independent in manner. Neither was she of so pronounced a type.

Her hair was a soft, reddish-brown and her eyes were a gentle hazel shade that come with a peculiar transparent skin.

Her friend at whose feet she sat was nearer thirty than twenty, and had known Margaret from her childhood.

She looked at her now, with the color coming and going in her face, and sighing said:

If I had the courage to go to bed before twelve o'clock I might have that pretty color in my cheeks that you have now. New York does do one up, there's no doubt about it.

"Then come on a visit to me," cried Margaret eagerly. "We shall have such a nice time; Mamma, Elsie, Aunt Maitland and you and I!"

Miss Atwood looked at her friend doubtfully. "Mamma, Elsie, Aunt Maitland and you and I" did not make up a summer for her any more than the proverbial swallow would have done.

"You see," she said, frankly, "in a few weeks more I shall be thirty, and I must begin to think seriously about my future. I am at an age when I can't waste a summer. Really, now that I think of it, this summer will probably be the last grace given me by my friends. Yes! I must decide on him very soon."

"Oh! Leda! surely you wouldn't pick *him* out as you would a gown, would you?"

"Why not? a woman never knows the man she's marrying. All men are about the same. It's all chance, with ten to one against your happiness."

"You speak as though you'd been fond of some one."

"I don't think I have; you see I never was lucky with bachelors. Married men fly to me, as weary travellers to a green spot in the desert. A woman who says what she means is a refreshing oasis in the Sahara of non-committal women."

"Leda, you don't mean half you say."

"Oh! but I do. Men like to marry women who say nothing but, 'yes,' 'no,' 'perhaps!' 'did you really do that?' 'Oh, how brave you were!' They revel in playing the hero before these simple women's eyes; the same

eyes that see every inch of vantage ground they have gained. After marriage how a man does like to meet a woman he can talk to! It's such a relaxation! Some women expand after matrimony, and venture an opinion once in a while, but the exception only proves the rule, you know."

"Leda, you see as well as I do that our mothers are not like that: my mother has opinions of her own, and she is not afraid to express them either."

"After marriage. Oh, certainly not. The fact stares us in the face that there's nothing a man likes so much as being fooled. I never knew one of these 'don't know' type of women, who didn't know much more than her prayers. They're always deep. I've tried men with this sweetness; fed it to them by the spoonful, and they've jumped at the spoon and asked for more. It's too much trouble as a rule, though. I only do it as a pastime."

Margaret rose and put her hands on her friend's shoulders.

"Leda," she said, "I do believe you're in love. I never heard a woman talk like that who was not."

"*L'amore è un pianto, dolce ed amara.* A tragedy. But it is a grief to be *blasé* and to lose the sweet and bitter pain of it."

"Pain? Ah, Leda, then you must have loved,

some time or other, for we never know a pain 'till we feel it. I think I don't want a sweetheart just yet—"

"Yet! and you twenty-one! and not even one little affair of the heart?"

"No; my first adventure is yet to come. But I am content to wait. This is a big world. In the end, some one comes for each of us and then, —happiness!" "Why, dear! I hate to hear you speak so of love, because it is the only thing that raises people above their cares and troubles. It is—" half whispering, "sacred to me."

A day dream followed their thoughts—a hush fell over them.

The rain had ceased. The sun poured down a benediction on the cloudy afternoon. A bird outside the window burst into a glad song—the song that seems to come from birds who feel 'tis good to live.

A maid servant came in with two cards. She handed them to Miss Atwood:

Mr. Archibald Hunter.

Mr. Robert Van Kever.

CHAPTER IV.

"I HOPE I MAY NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN!"

THE maid went out of the room reluctantly, and left the door slightly ajar. Leda Atwood shut it with a decisive push.

"I don't wonder she wanted to hear what I should say, for oh, Margaret! this Mr. Van Kever who has come with Mr. Hunter is a—well he's a revelation. Really I must tell you about him before you meet. I've seen him so often at the opera that I've quite got used to him. Besides, I've met him several times."

Margaret laughed nervously. Leda did not know that they had met.

There was hardly time to explain now.

"In order to appreciate him you must see him," continued Leda, "for I cannot do him justice in simple narrative. He's a cripple. He's rather a shock at first, but one gets used to him in time. Now come, dearie. No! you shall not stop to primp; you're too pretty as it is. Mr. Hunter tells me that Mr. Van Kever has a *penchant* for pretty women. Funny, isn't it? One would think he'd hate them."

Margaret Beale hesitated.

His lips had left a scar from their burning con-

tact. Not visible, but she could remember the impression on her arm even now.

"I am not very well, Leda; excuse me this time."

Leda Atwood seized her arm forcibly and the two women went down together arm in arm, like school-girls.

At the foot of the stairs Margaret suddenly remembered that she had left a ring belonging to her mother lying upon a table upstairs and hurried back for it, leaving Miss Atwood to receive the guests.

It was an odd superstition. She felt that the ring would be a talisman. She feared this man. The ring would keep her mother's face before her.

They were all three deep in the discussion of the forthcoming production of the "Princess Zelda," when Margaret came into the room. Turning quickly, she saw Van Kever in the corner of the sofa. He wore a long, gray coat that looked glaringly white in the shaded parlor.

She remembered then that they had never been formally introduced. They had talked and met, knowing each other's names only. She determined to ignore him if possible.

He fixed his eyes penetratingly upon her.

"Miss Beale, our 'Princess Zelda,' Mr. Van Kever," Leda said.

Margaret bowed coldly, and turning her

back on him, sank into the nearest chair. Her hands were icy cold, and so wet that in clasping her gown they left damp prints on it. A feeling of suffocation came over her: a low French window was open: she walked quickly to it, stepping out on its sill. Hunter followed her.

"I cannot sit in the room with him," she whispered. "He is repulsive to me."

"Who?"

"He!"

"Van Kever?"

"Yes."

"Oh! you won't mind him after you talk with him a minute!"

"I can't talk with him. Do you think he sees that I came out to avoid him?"

"Who, Robert?" with a laugh; "not a bit of it. He would never think of anybody avoiding him. Why," in a lower tone and looking into the room from the little balcony outside the window, "he's chatting away quite pleasantly to Miss Atwood. Miss Beale, I wish you knew him better. He's a splendid fellow."

Hunter's full face and frank gray eyes grew animated.

Miss Atwood interrupted them. She followed them to the window and pointing to a flower jar, said: "Look! I am very proud of this plant; it is a rare variety and has never blossomed till now. My sister, Mrs. Story, has had it for years,

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but it would not blossom. I adopted it about two months ago, and look at it now, full of beautiful, half-opened buds."

"And your recipe for making plants bloom, Miss Atwood?" Hunter asked.

"A plant that can blossom and won't blossom must be made to—"

"But how?—if your sister's treatment failed."

"I will explain. I never paid any attention to it—neglected it. Look at it now: it has budded in very spite. My sister had been killing it with kindness."

"That's a way women have," said Hunter, confidentially. "Plants are like women: to succeed with them one should be indifferent. That's a theory I firmly believe in."

"Have you always succeeded?" Leda asked, with mock gravity.

Hunter laughed, then stepping further out on the balcony, wiped his eye-glasses, and putting them on, glanced carelessly at her.

"Ask me that question another time. Let me first test my capacity for indifference fully."

"One must have a capacity for indifference as well as for loving. To love well is a talent," Van Kever said, as he bent forward to see Margaret, who had been standing in the shadow, making a faint pretence of listening to the usual badinage between Hunter and Miss Atwood.

"Miss Beale, may I see that wonderful flower?"

At the sound of Van Kever's voice and her own name, Margaret started, hesitated, and then carried the small colored *jardinière* to his side. The buds of dark, silky red were beginning to burst into blossoms—blood colored, gorgeous, open-hearted things, breathing of Mexico, and hot, sandy plains.

"Forgive me for letting you hold that jar; it is too heavy for you." In taking it, Van Kever's hand touched hers; as he placed the jar upon the ground their eyes met: in his, a half awakened interest; in hers a look of repugnance. Any other man could have read her glance. To him it bore as little meaning as an Assyrian inscription. He did not understand the language in the story of her face. The gift of egotism that lies within the hearts of all deformed creatures was his, and added to it, the daring, the savage delight of the man whose will was dominant over others. Look which way she would, she felt his eyes fixed on her, and in them lay some spell to draw her mentally nearer and nearer to him, while the attraction repelled her, physically, more and more.

"I hate you," she whispered to herself.

She answered his questions in monosyllables, as she remained seated motionless by his side.

Finally, all pretence of talking ceased, and from

the balcony they heard Leda telling Mr. Hunter about the account book she was keeping to show her sister.

Her efforts at household management evidently amused Hunter, for he laughed, and then their voices outside were lost in a noise from the street.

Margaret slipped a ring around on her finger—the ring she had put on a few moments before. In twisting it about her finger, it fell to the floor, on a rug in front of Van Kever.

As he picked it up, he looked at it curiously :

"What an odd ring! It looks as though it might have a history—a very old setting I see."

"It is my mother's," she said. The ring was a heavy band and had the word, "Kismet," studded deep in it, in turquoise.

"'Fate!' I am a great believer in fate," he said, "perhaps because fate has generally come my way. 'What is to be will be.' Curiously enough, my greatest successes have not come through any efforts of mine ; they have come to me blindly. Of course 'Fate' may be the usual accident, but there is a fatality when many accidents fall in the way of one man, deserting another with everything seemingly in his favor."

He lifted her hand to put the ring back on her finger.

She shuddered, and stared at his nervous, white hands as he slipped the studded circle of gold half on.

"People make wishes when they do this sort of thing," he said. "May I?"

"May you—"

"May I wish your ring on?"

She made no answer.

"I wish that 'Kismet' may deal gently with me and make us friends."

"The wish is lost in the telling of it," she answered him.

"Then if it is lost I can charm it back. You forget—that night," he said.

At that moment, Leda and Hunter came into the room, and Van Keverer could say no more to her.

The two men did not stay long. When the street door had closed behind them, Miss Atwood went upstairs to write. Margaret nestled in the cushions of an ottoman and faced the sofa on which he had been sitting.

"I hope I may never see you again," she said, and drew the ring from her finger.

The impression of his deformed and peculiar personality came freshly and involuntarily over her.

She seemed to see him sitting there, watching her. Going quickly out of the room, she hastily closed the door after her, and ran swiftly up the stairs to join Leda.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRINCESS ZELDA.

“BRAVO! Bravo!

The words were accompanied by a loud clapping of hands as the dramatist, standing at the extreme end of the theatre to study the effect of his great scene, realized that his heroine was equal to the trying situation.

It was the final rehearsal of his play, and Hunter was satisfied with his “Princess.”

Margaret Beale was dressed in a close fitting travelling gown of gray material, and the searching lime light seemed to penetrate the cloth, and bring into sharp outline her lithe figure. She had spoken the final words of her part.

“He is dead, you say? Then why do I love him still? If he is dead, then love is madness, for loving him still, I am wedded to a phantom.”

Her eyes looked steadily into the gloom—the words of her part seemed to have thrown her into a trance.

She turned deliberately round, and went into one of the dark stage boxes, lit only by a struggling gleam of sickly, yellow daylight from the dome of the theatre. In the gloom she stretched out her arm to draw a curtain back, when her hand touched some one.

She could not see, but she felt, she instantly knew whose hand it was that held her own.

"I have been watching you, and wishing you'd come in here," Van Kever said.

"You willed me to come. I felt it, but could not control myself," she answered, trying to draw her hand away; but he held it firmly in his strong grasp.

There was a silence.

In the close, narrow box, she could hear his heavy breathing.

He bent toward her, and his arm touched her own, clad in its thin sleeve.

She drew slightly away from him, but he, in turning, moved toward her. A bunch of white violets at her throat poured out a heavy perfume.

"When I first saw you, you wore those flowers. I've remembered it. Give them to me," he whispered, and he undid the pin in the wet stems, and held the blossoms to his lips.

"I shall sit in this box to see you play the 'Princess Zelda.' I shall look at you, and think of this."

She had remained passive, amazed, disturbed, till now, when she arose quickly.

His passion had weakened his strange power, and the spell was momentarily broken.

"Let me pass, please."

Van Kever dropped her wrist.

"You won't go like this, will you? I want to

know you better; to know all about you. Why can't we be good friends?"

She moved by him, and turning to quit the box her foot missed a step and she would have fallen but that she was within his reach and he caught her in his long, outstretched arms.

Her head struck against a chair, and for an instant she was stunned.

Van Kever held her tightly in his embrace.

"Are you hurt?" he whispered.

"No."

"Before I let you go, one kiss."

She averted her head.

"Do you know," he said, his lips drawing nearer to hers, "what my wish really was when I put on your ring? It was this: that I might hold you in my arms and kiss you, as I do now—as I do now. I knew I should, but I did not think so soon."

The crushing strength of his arms—so strangely at variance with his form—and the close, warm pressure of his lips clinging to her own sent a subtle shiver of pain through her whole being.

There was a daring in the act that overpowered her; an assurance that defied the possibilities of his unlovely form.

As a bird quivers and stiffens under the eye of a serpent, so Margaret trembled.

A sudden revulsion of feeling followed immediately upon the recklessness of his action: her

strength returned, while his had weakened, and dragging herself with a muffled exclamation of rage from his embrace, she went on to the stage and through the rest of her part, leaving the place directly after the rehearsal was over.

She wanted to be alone—to think. What had she done? Was she quite mad, she wondered, to suffer this man to sit by her, holding her hand in his, leaning against her body?—Last of all, he had kissed her! Her face burned at the remembrance. Reaching the house she stood in the hallway, and heard Leda singing; then, listening for a moment she went to the room where she had first seen Van Kever.

Closing the door, she sat down and thought of all he had said that day. The trick of his laugh when some saying by Hunter amused him again came over her. Her arms and shoulders felt the impress of his embrace still. The touch of him was as a profane remembrance.

He had done what no other man had dared before, and she had submitted.

There is a spell in strength to most women, and some potent though unrecognized influence affected Margaret in relation to this man, even while his appearance and assurance repelled her.

There was a pitying mood in her feelings.

The thought of this man's success in life, in spite of the almost insurmountable obstacles in his way, his indomitable courage, his strange, self-

willed nature fascinated her, as a curious being seemingly apart from ordinary mortals will draw and hold our attention and have a common attraction for us, born of wonder and morbid curiosity. There was something in the very thought of him that set her nerves a-tingle, like unto a faint electric shock.

A servant who had seen her come in handed her a box. It was filled with white violets, and his card lay among them.

She realized that he had returned the flowers he had taken from her. She dropped the box on the cushions beside her, and her cheeks turned crimson. On a sudden impulse, she knelt down beside the flowers and buried her face in them.

"I HATE him," she said.

CHAPTER VI.

THE INVITATION.

THE morning after the anticipated production of "Princess Zelda" at the Berkeley Lyceum had long dawned, while the heroine of Hunter's play still roamed beyond the border-line of earth-existence, amid the irrational fancies of a dream-land. The bustle of the household stir came to her in her dream, and partly loosed its spell.

Who has not lived a dual existence in this way?

To Margaret, the play she had just left behind passes again before her in a series of pantomimic tableaux, only the stage which she is treading now reveals, as all scenes witnessed in slumber, a curious phantasmagoria, shadowed with darkness.

The faces of the people are indistinguishable, —all but one; *his* face from a box near her is forcing her to look his way, until the stage suddenly slips from under her and she stands in the green room.

A crowd is there; among its members an omnipresent "first nighter."

He holds out his hand to congratulate her, offering her a bunch of flowers. In her dream she cannot remember the man's name, but distinguishes him by his deep-caped coat, while she refuses the blossoms.

"Do you not see," she says, "that I cannot take them? I have others—from *him*," and when he tries to force the roses into her grasp she cries out:

"No, no! He is looking from that box. He is calling me! I must go!" and as she rushes to the door the people strive to hold her back.

"You are mad," some one says, "no one is calling you;" and pointing to where she has seen the face, another one cries:

"Look! the place is empty."

She answers back, triumphantly:

"He is there," while she hurriedly enters the box.

"If he is there, touch him."

She puts her hand on the place where she has seen him.

Even while her eyes still clearly see the figure of the man, her hand falls through into empty air; she cannot touch him. His misshapen form, his gleaming eyes, his thin, tremulous lips, are but the human outlines of a mocking phantom.

Unconscious of this nightmare and indifferent to the exploits of Margaret's fancy, Leda Atwood opens the door of her room softly, and with a glance takes in the delicate picture that has fascinated heroes and idiots alike. The only picture where love's illusion, openly betrayed, must stand the test of honest merit—a woman's bedroom.

Through the yellow shades the morning sun struggles vainly to flood the room with its brilliant, searching light. Upon a lounge at the foot of the bed pretty gowns of fine, filmy stuffs have been carelessly thrown in the hurry of retiring the night before.

A delicate silk shawl of soft white crêpe de chine trails from a card-board box, such as milliners use, to the ground, while beneath its soft folds lies a court gown worn by the stage Princess.

Apparel of all sorts is thrown carelessly about

the room, as though their owner under pressure of excitement had been indifferent to their fate.

On the toilet table flowers that had lain all night out of water make the air heavy with their dead, crushed leaves, and scent of decay.

Stockings and ruffled skirts are heaped upon a chair close to the bed and a pair of dainty slippers peep from under it.

On the broad, low pillows, her girl's throat and soft transparent skin showing yet the traces of a whitened "make up" from the night before, lies she who had been the "Princess Zelda."

Her thick dark braids of hair swing out over the white sheet's edge in two long plaits, and hang, where the ends are unbraided, as heavy fringed tassels.

Through her sleep Margaret hears Leda give some household direction to her servant, and the words produce an effect upon her senses such as the voices of the living have over us when we lie in death-still trance, as we go out in spirit to meet the fret and jar of active life, out from the border land of that poppy-strewn place of sleep.

All women love to lie abed in the morning with their hands above their heads—thinking.

Perhaps planning the coming day's campaign, as a general would a battle. Who can tell? who knows? who can even dare to guess what silent warfare rages in a woman's brain?

It is a receptacle for quips and cranks, logic and nonsense—to be instantly abandoned at a crisis in favor of blind instinct.

A fanciful little mind, excited over religion one day and a baby's gown the next.

Only a woman's brain can accomplish such feats, for, while the mystery of political topics and things merely masculine are materially well known to women, what manly man has ever viewed a baby's gown as a thing the putting together of which he knew and understood, any more than he could comprehend the mothers of these gowned babies?

When first Margaret awoke, the dream seemed a reality to her. Her eyes opened wide, wondering; she expected to see his face leaning over her beside the bed.

Looking about the room, and seeing the great heap of withered flowers that had been left to die, she remembers how, on reaching home long past midnight, she had thought only of getting into bed, and to forget in the darkness and silence of the bedroom the excitement she had just passed through.

Now the night had gone, and the excited, nervous mood with it.

With the first return of reason she remembers that among all the messages of congratulation, she had received none from Van Kever.

"Perhaps he has written me," is her first

thought, as Leda steps silently to the bedside and places a pile of letters on a little table.

Picking them up, Margaret shuffles through them. There is one from her mother, one from Aunt Maitland, one from her sister Elsie, one from—ah! there it is! one from him!

She had half opened it, when Leda spoke:

“Lazy child! it’s very late, but as you didn’t get home until after one o’clock I kept every one in the house as still as a mouse, so that you could sleep. Who do you think is here?”

“Mr. Van Keever!” says Margaret, quickly, and then blushes violently, as she realizes that she has nearly betrayed herself.

Leda looks at her inquiringly a moment.

“How did you know?” she asks, slowly.

“I didn’t—I only thought it—” and then Margaret stops, and the two women question each other in silent gaze. Leda was older than Margaret. She had learned the motto for a woman of the world—discretion.

“Knowing how you disliked him,” continues Leda, “I just sent down word that you were very tired, and—” before the words were spoken almost, Margaret has jumped from her bed and to Leda’s surprise she says, deliberately:

“Ask him to wait—I will see him.”

Leda left the room, wondering as to whether Hunter would be a safe confidant.

Could Margaret be in love with this man? It seemed too horrible to believe.

In ten minutes' time Margaret was going down the stairs, pausing at every other step to clasp the fastenings of the soft crêpe tea gown she had hurriedly slipped on.

Van Kever did not see her as she entered; he was intently studying a note book.

"What must you think of me? I was only just getting up when you came?" she says. He looks at her, surprised.

His impression of her while waiting had been the one retained from the evening before, as he had seen her from his box. The figure of a tall slender girl-woman, with a slow, subtle smile, and a measured, pretty way of doling out her words that added interest as one listened for the tardy succession of pleasant, mellow sounds.

Now, coming before him without the trappings of the stage, her height seemed taken from her by the level of the room, and the contour of her bust and body seemed full and plump.

"You must excuse me for coming so early," he answers, "but I am obliged to spend the afternoon with my mother at our country place."

She sinks into the soft cushions of an ottoman and, her arms resting on her knees, she poises her head forward on her hands and looks straight into his eyes.

"I dreamed of you last night," she says, abruptly.

"Yes! what was your dream?" he asks. There is a tinge of indifference in his tone that displeases her.

She drops her eyes before his gaze, and fixes them upon the toe of her small, beaded slipper; then she continues:

"I dreamed of you, exactly as I saw you last night, and when I went to you and put my hand on your arm there was nothing there; you were air."

"Ah! but I'm not anything so ethereal," he answers. "See, am I not flesh and blood?" and taking her hand he puts it on his shoulder and draws the other one to his arm.

So near to him, Margaret notices that his face looks dark and tanned, against his light, loose coat, and that deep yellow lines dart around his eyes.

"No! I'm not as ethereal as air," he repeats while he drops her hands, and crossing the room goes over to the mantel-piece, "though I may have brought the spirit of the north wind home with me, for I spent yesterday and the day before on my yacht, getting back just in time to see you and be charmed with your pretty acting of last evening.

"Miss Beale," he continues, more earnestly, "not another soul in that theatre appreciated

the charm of your voice as I did. Hunter was delighted with you. He sent a message to Miss Atwood through me, and I have one also to deliver on my own account. I desire you and Miss Atwood, with whomsoever she chooses to ask, to come with me to-morrow to see a really wonderful collection of orchids at Fordham. Their owner is an old friend of mine. He gave me permission to ask whom I pleased. The drive there will be a pleasant one." He pauses a moment, then adds: "We might stop for luncheon on our way back."

At that moment, Leda appears at the door. She holds a yellow envelope in her hand.

"I've got to leave you, Margaret, early to-morrow morning," she says. "My sister has wired me to join her at Lenox; her little boy is ill—not dangerously so, but he is more than she can attend to."

There is a worried look in her eyes, as she adds: "I hate leaving you alone, Margaret, dear."

"If there is anything I can do to be of service—" Van Kever begins, but at that moment a servant brings a card to Miss Atwood and hastily excusing herself she goes out to receive a visitor.

"Are you fond of orchids?" asks Van Kever.

"I love all flowers," answers Margaret.

"Then come with me to-morrow."

"I shall be alone—please excuse me, I—"

“Will you go?” he persists, his eyes fixed on her as on that night at Mrs. Rousby’s.

“I know of no one to go with me.”

“*Come alone!*”

“How can I! what would Leda say if she knew it?” She speaks softly, and against her own volition has moved to his side. He seizes her hand. His touch thrills her.

“I am satisfied—you *will* come,” he says.

At that moment Leda, accompanied by her brother-in-law, comes back to say that she will leave on the afternoon train for Lenox.

CHAPTER VII.

AT VAN KEEVER’S ROOMS.

“ARE you tired?” Van Kever asked, on the following day, as the coupé rattled along homewards from their country trip.

“No; I have had a charming afternoon. I wish Leda could have seen the orchids.”

“I don’t, unless you miss her and find the drive with me tiresome. It has been a great pleasure, one of the few bright days that illumine a rather dreary life.”

He watched her, with a side glance, to note the effect of his words. Her face glowed.

“I am very glad that I can in any way add to

your happiness," she said, speaking almost in a whisper.

"You cannot imagine," he went on, "how I appreciate your surrender of all scruples, by taking this trip with me to-day alone. I almost think you did it to please me—yet why should I say that, so few people really feel or care."

"I care."

She could not repress the words.

The coupé rattled on, while the two inside were silent. The seat was narrow, they were very close together.

An electric light streamed into the carriage as they turned a corner. Van Kever grasped her shoulders and drew her into the white light. She hung her head.

"No, no!" he cried, "look up; I want to read in your face what you have just thought," and then she turned her face to his.

For an instant her features blurred before his eyes.

The coupé jolted suddenly, and in its quick swirl, she was thrown nearer to him.

"We must be near home," she said, unsteadily.

"I cannot bear to lose you so soon, Margaret; dine with me to-night. No! don't shake your head. Be kind and come. Don't condemn me to a lonely bit of dinner at the club. Leda is away. Say yes!"

The coupé crossed Twenty-third Street, and continuing up Fifth Avenue a short distance drew up alongside the pavement in front of a shop window.

Van Kever alighted, and entering a side door, Margaret followed him slowly up a narrow flight of stairs. She could think of nothing but the ungainly figure climbing clumsily in front of her. His presence ruled her.

"My rooms," explains Van Kever, when within two steps of the second landing.

Johnson, hearing the carriage stop, has opened the door, and even he notices that for an instant Margaret hesitates. Van Kever has anticipated this, however, and invitingly extends his hand toward her.

They enter a hall. In the flickering light of a hall-lamp above their heads, a huge oak carved chiffonnière looms up before them, and in the large, square mirror above it Margaret sees a pale, girlish face and wonders if it is her own reflection.

An entrance on the left is covered with dark, heavy curtains. Johnson noiselessly parts a pair of thick velvet portières on the right, and Van Kever leads Margaret into a great square room.

A big carved oak table stands in the centre, bright with snow white cloth and shining silver.

Covers are set for two.

"You expected that I would come," says Margaret, hesitating as she notices the table.

"Not at all; I expected Hunter," quickly replies Van Kever.

The only light in the apartment comes from the wax candles on the table, and the rose-tinted shades subdue their flames and make the dark coloring and decoration of the room seem more ominous and shadowy. A miniature basket of white violets stands on a small ivory table in a corner, filling the air with their burden of sweet perfume. The ceiling is lofty, while the stained and polished floor is almost hidden beneath the hush of heavy rugs and tiger skins. The sombre grandeur of the Henry VIII. period in which the room abounds makes a strange contrast for the hunch-backed figure standing there, almost lost in a cavern of shadow, as he watches Margaret's face.

A motion of his hand, and obediently Johnson retires, dropping the portières in their place again. As they fall noiselessly together, Van Kever sinks into an easy chair in a window corner of the room; it is an old fashioned hand sleigh that has carried many a *grande dame* of the Louis XV. court across the ice, pressed into service by some gallant courtier.

Margaret throws her hat on a chair, and looks curiously at everything that surrounds Van

Keever. The fact of his living there gives the room a subtle attraction for her. She must see every book, every picture, all the appointments that his eyes see daily. She knows in her heart that she should not be there, and for that reason assumes all the more careless unconcern in her manner.

"So you call these bachelor quarters."

Van Kever is watching her, amused at her curiosity.

"Yes," he answers; "you can imagine how lonely I am here sometimes."

She smiles.

"Come, sir, don't expect me to pity you. I never saw bachelor's quarters before, but I will never condole with a man who talks to me about his cheerless fireside again. Why, it couldn't be any cosier if a woman lived here, and arranged all those pretty things," with an airy wave of her full-gloved arm. "Whose taste? your sister's?"

"No."

A word, the least word, and she might turn on him, and after that she would never speak to him again.

He knew women.

So much depended on trifles in these matters.

Espying a bookcase, she opens the first volume her hand touches; it is a copy of Swinburne, and

the page turns to the famous poem, "Atalanta in Calydon."

"I was reading that yesterday," he says, from the shadow that envelopes the corner where he is sitting. He had placed the book, so that it would be the first she should touch, and he knew it would open at this very page.

He was an artist in affairs of the heart.

"I never read anything of his," and Margaret's low voice runs on with the burden of the verse,

"And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night,
Fleeter of foot than the fleet-foot kid,
Follows with dancing and fills with delight,
The mænad and the bassarid."

Bending her head nearer the soft candle light, she repeats the lines again to herself in a lower tone.

The rose-colored shades soften the flesh tints of her neck, and the clinging lace around it loosens as if in obedience to Van Kever's secret thoughts.

The charm of these lines to her are in the fact that his eyes have looked at them, his hands have touched the page.

Like most young girls of Margaret's innocence and purity, this first magnetic influence, this first love spell appealed keenly to her unawakened passion. She did not realize that her senses only yielded to this fascination, not her heart.

Guided only by the surface powers of her nature, she mistook the sense of touch, of sight, of hearing for serious thought ; nay more, for love.

This simulated feeling takes possession of her now, as the verse hums its musical metre merrily through her head, and tunes itself into a jingle in her brain, until she walks, talks, and moves to the catch in the rhyme.

Each little black letter weaves a spell, like so many tiny little imps, to throw some mystic charm around her.

She even tries to put herself in the mood he had been in when he marked the lines :

“ And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night,
Fleeter of foot than the fleet-foot kid,
Follows with dancing and fills with delight,
The mænad and the bassarid.”

As she passes the piano, she looks over some music. “ Sing something,” Van Kever asks of her.

Her blood tingles, as she seems to feel his ardent gaze as though it were his touch about her form, and mechanically her fingers draw a rich harmony from the instrument, and with her gaze fastened on a picture of the friar in Juliette’s story she sings.

It is a song of love.

The story of a hapless passion and its sacred sacrifice. She sings it as sweetly, innocently, as a child singing to its doll.

"I wonder how much this woman knows?"

Van Kever asks the question in his secret thought.

For the past two hours the same question has been formulating in his mind.

Now he decides that of love, or of passion she knows nothing.

The desire of the man grows stronger within him every moment. He would like to teach her the meaning of one word, that in the learning of of it she might sing the song as other women had done under the same spell.

As she wheels around on the piano chair, he notices her gown is of blue stuff, with a white loose front in it.

"You look like a large plump bluebird," he says; and they both laugh as two people will, who temporarily inhabit a fool's paradise.

"Dinner is served," Johnson announces in the doorway.

"Dear me! It seems no time at all since we came in," exclaims Margaret.

In reality it had been fifteen minutes. Van Kever knows this, and is silent.

Without hesitation, Margaret daintily caresses her hair before the mirror. It is a novelty to her, this dinner *a deux*. She has a vague notion that only very pretty women are admitted to such honors, and her vanity whispers:

"You must be beautiful—for him."

Van Kever carries the basket of white violets from their obscurity and puts them in the centre of the table, and they seem to blush in the roseate shading of the lights.

"I will sit here in the mother's seat," Margaret says.

"When I was a little girl, my younger brother and I used to quarrel at our impromptu tea parties over which of us should be the 'mother' and pour out the tea." The curves in her wrist show graceful outlines as she lifts a glass.

"And why did you both want to be the mother?" he asks, sitting near her.

"Why? Because the mother got the most tea."

The womanly indifference with which Margaret accepts this dinner, as if it had been a feast prepared by magic, amuses Van Kever.

"You enjoy the dinner?" he asks presently, while Johnson fills her claret glass.

"It is delicious," she answers, simply.

"You don't ask me by what rapid transit process it has been cooked," he adds, smiling; "or how it happened to be waiting for us."

"How was it?" she asks.

"Because I ordered it for you yesterday."

She pushes back her chair.

"I knew you'd come," he explains.

An angry light comes into her eyes. At that moment the bell rings sharply.

"That's Hunter's ring!" Van Kever declares.

There is a pause. Hunter rings again.

"If he keeps on some one is sure to let him in," he continues, ruefully.

"Johnson, bolt the door, he orders."

No sooner is the order obeyed, than they hear footsteps coming up the stairs. Some one has let him in.

The two sit looking fixedly at each other.

The man without knocks loudly. He knows by Van Kever's brightly lit windows that some one is in his rooms.

The notion of being shut in a cosy apartment that some one outside is vainly trying to enter, and the subtle pleasure of picturing Hunter's amazement could he have peeped into the room and recognized Van Kever's visitor lends a spice of zest to the situation.

After a parting knock at the door, they hear him descending the stairs again.

"The King of France is going down the hill," Van Kever says, and Johnson brings in the coffee.

After the coffee, Van Kever foregoes his cigarette to draw his chair nearer Margaret.

"You make me think of a dear sweet woman I knew," he begins. "I hear from her yet. She is in England now. She cared for me once—but I knew her life would only be made unhappy, through mine, so I bade her good bye! The day

she sailed, I longed to say: "Don't go, don't go—for my sake! stay—but I left it unsaid." There was a pause; then he added, "I am not so brave now."

"And do you care for her yet?" Margaret asked, slowly, "as—as you used to?"

"I respect her—she is my dear friend—love her?—no!"

"That will do, Johnson," says Van Kever, testily.

The presence of the servant, as he clears the table, is irksome to both of them.

As the valet glides noiselessly away, the portières have barely fallen behind his retreating figure when Van Kever siezes her hand and presses it to his lips, parched and dry with evil thirst.

"Let us sit here," he says in whispers, lest the unsteady tones of his voice should awaken her alarm. In an obscure corner is a luxurious divan, covered with handsomely embroidered Turkish and Persian cushions.

He leaps into the soft labyrinth, and with a fearful strength draws her head upon a cushion beside him. He does not heed her muffled cry, the echo of her soul in its last rebellion.

Her eyes droop and the lids flutter drowsily, like a dove's under the baneful gleam of the serpent's eye.

Van Kever controls himself well, and as they

chat in disconnected phrases, he deftly takes the hair pins one by one from her hair, without forcing her attention to what he is doing. He has gained his skill by long experience, and his hands pass lightly to the large tortoise shell comb. The thought gratifies his mood that until now only gentler hands than his have dared to do what he is doing. To him the beauty of her hair is that it has not trailed in the dust.

He has taken out the last pin, when she realizes dreamily what he has done. He shakes out the soft, silken meshes of hair, and, falling, they spread over her neck, forming a canopy under which which his hand creeps. How glossy this hair; how soft, how thick! "How great the difference," he thinks, "between this one and those others. I am indeed fortunate." Johnson calls but does not come in.

"May I go out for the evening?"

"No," Van Kever answers, briefly.

His voice frightens Margaret and she starts to her feet. "It must be late," she exclaims, "I must go."

"No, it is not late. Please don't hurry away like this. Don't go so soon."

"I must go."

Van Kever looks at her with half shut, speculative eyes. "Johnson," he says, "call a coupé."

Margaret twists her hair into a rough knot, and her hands and wrists grow red with the

exertion of reaching upward. She slips on her hat and when its pin has fastened it firmly and she has found her gloves, Van Kever motions her to a seat beside him and she obeys. "Sit down," he says, "when will you come again?"

"I don't know."

"Yes, you do! When? Soon?"

"Perhaps."

"Kiss me good-night," he murmurs, weakly. She leans her head upon his shoulder.

"I shall not let you go like this again," he whispers, "so soon; the next time you must pay me a longer visit."

"I feel half asleep," she murmurs, stupidly, "ever since you let my hair down. I know I look odd. Don't I?"

"Not at all; you are beautiful."

As with an effort, she moves toward the curtains. He catches her hand and holds the portières together. "Promise me you will come again—soon—the day after to-morrow—Friday," he urges, fervidly.

"I will see."

"Say—I will come."

"No—let me go!—yes—I promise"

CHAPTER VIII.

AND ANGELS WEPT.

VAN KEEVER was lying at full length on a sofa, welcoming such stray breeze as might innocently lose its way in the great city, and puff into the room through the open windows. It was early in the evening, and like most men of the world, Van Kever never cared to go out too early. The plot and passion of his life rarely developed much before midnight.

He heard voices on the stairs. Women laughing, and men encouraging their folly, in undertones, as usual.

It was Johnson's day out.

"Come in!" cried Van Kever, in answer to a light tap on the door.

A woman came in first.

"Bertie, I thought I knew your voice," exclaims Van Kever. As she came to the side of the sofa, he kissed her gloved hand.

"Did you see that, Mr. Motford?" she asked of a dapper little man, who slowly followed her.

"Yes, my dear," answered the dapper little man, "and I admire his taste. How are you, Van Kever?"

Mr. Motford shook his hand after a dispirited, helpless fashion peculiarly his own,

"We've brought Mrs. Grandolph with us," he announced.

"I know you are always glad to see me," exclaimed that lady, advancing into the room.

"Always, my dear Mrs. Grandolph."

She is a small woman, insignificant and child-like beside Mrs. Motford's plump personality.

Mr. Motford assisted the ladies to remove their jackets. Hunter, who was one of the party, strolled over to the window, and looked idly into the street.

He was such a dreamy fellow when not under the influence of any active undertaking.

A book lay on the table. Mrs. Motford picked it up.

"Ah! Edgar Saltus' last. Who has read it?"

"I have! Not bad!" declared Hunter.

"He hates it," laughed Van Kever, "because the plot is not suited to steal for dramatization. Speaking of Hunter, Saltus said to me one day, 'I like Hunter. He is bound to succeed, because he is constantly fertilizing the pasture of his imagination with other men's brains.'"

"Clever, very clever indeed," Mr. Motford rejoined, abstractedly, looking at his watch. "Sorry to leave you, but I have an appointment at the club. I'll come back for you later, my dear."

Mrs. Motford waved her hand carelessly, and the devoted husband hastily withdrew. Van

Keever took the book from Mrs. Motford's hand, and turned the pages carelessly.

"There's one chapter here," he said, "about the neatest thing, in the way of testing how much the public will stand, that I've seen yet. Let me read it to you."

Van Kees sat in a chair, the book on his knees, and slowly and with much emphasis read a portion of a certain chapter.

"The girl had thrown herself upon the soft, cool grass, and mad, wild bees, drunk with the honey of flowers, flew about her head. The pine needles fell from the trees above her, and left their scent in her hair. She was clad in some sheer white stuff. The face of the man bending over her looked oddly brown against her pallid sleeve. Where an unruly plant held her skirt back, a line of silken clocked work, showed on her open-meshed stocking that revealed the flesh through its pattern. The man, Buten Arkard, was intoxicated by the beauty of the woman and the hour. It was twilight, and already great shadows threw their deepening, sinuous shapes under the trees and made graves. Arkard pressed his lips on her soft, fair throat.

"'Love, do you love me?' she murmured, huskily.

"For answer he gathered her into his arms. That was at five o'clock. At seven the question

was answered. She could face death now. She had known love !”

There was a pause. Hearing a cessation in the reading, Hunter turned back into the room.

“The modern American novel,” he said, “grows worse daily. I shall be glad when it has run its course, and the public is satiated.”

“Will the public ever be satiated?” Van Kever asked, gravely.

Hunter left the query unnoticed.

“I hope then a reaction will set in which will demand that the heroine be dressed in Quaker gowns, and drink nothing but—”

“Bromo caffeine!” suggested Mrs. Motford, laughing.

“No, buttermilk! Most women have forgotten the name.”

“We remember it in second childhood,” Mrs. Motford answered. “It is like religion; we take it up early and late in life.”

“Then again,” went on Hunter, “that abominable French epigrammatic style of writing will be done away with. Those chopped off phrases *à la* Victor Hugo that read when imitated in English as if one had begun a sentence and was called out of the room before one had time to finish it. And now we have this realistic school of American authors that has cropped up lately. They have read so many French translations that it is a case

of putting the cart before the horse becoming more absurd every day. If this keeps on, I mean to write a pamphlet and call it, 'French as it is Englished!' Why, in time, instead of saying, 'It's a fine day,' this class of fanatics will stretch it into, 'He makes handsome times the present day,' or will ask for a boiled potato as, 'an apple of the earth at the natural!'"

"If this era of perfection in fiction should ever set in, what will you do for your 'types of women,'" asked Van Kever, "that you dramatize from life? If people are too good to read about such frivolous women, they won't go to see them on the stage."

"Ah!" exclaimed Hunter, excitedly waving his eyeglasses, "that's a different matter; the public doesn't go to see the play now. They go to see the scenery and the star."

"I am sorry that I have no buttermilk to offer you, Hunter," said Van Kever, filling the wine glasses upon the table.

"Yes," chimed in Mrs. Motford, "at twenty, we trust over buttermilk, when at forty we doubt over wine."

"Shades of old Durand! not over this wine," cried Van Kever. "Who doubts over this wine, is a cynic."

"Worse than that," added Hunter, "he's dyspeptic."

"To the health of the perfect woman!" ex-

claimed Mrs. Motford, with a hard little laugh, as she held her glass high in air.

"To the young and innocent!" said Van Kever, gravely, sipping his wine.

"To her mother!" declared Hunter, melodramatically. They drained their glasses, and an awkward pause followed Hunter's toast. Mrs. Motford picked up her jacket, and affected preparations to go while she said gayly:

"If my other half comes here for me, tell him I grew tired of waiting and have gone home."

"Going?" asked Van Kever, with a tone that said "go."

Mrs. Grandolph was arranging her hat, until Hunter was ready to assist her with her coat.

"When are we to be photographed?" asked Mrs. Motford, moving toward the door.

Van Kever's eyes glistened a moment, as he contemplated the woman's plump figure, and understood the covert smile on her face.

"When it is cold enough to wear nothing but tiger skins," he answered, with a laugh; "I want the pictures taken in my rooms to be original. They must eclipse the French models of art."

"Never!" exclaimed Mrs. Grandolph, in a shrill voice; "my husband would never allow it."

"Don't ask him!" suggested Mrs. Motford, as they said good-night and went out chattering into the hall.

"Who was the woman in your rooms the other

night when I called?" asked Hunter of Van Kever, in a low tone.

"My sister; I didn't want her to meet a clever, dangerous Bohemian like you," answered Van Kever. They shook hands, laughing the while, and parted.

Their friendship was a peculiar one to the outside world; to each other a useful one. Hunter, a Bohemian to the core, had first met Van Kever at a very lively supper, where the wine, the women, and the mood of both had served to make them better friends than they would have become in weeks of ordinary acquaintance; Van Kever was a convenient friend when those little pecuniary difficulties that are apt to beset the paths of genius came upon him.

Van Kever was, in turn, launched by Hunter into the very heart of the two grades of Bohemian society. Through the influence of his family, which was one of the old Knickerbocker class, he had had a surfeit of what he termed, "eminently respectable" people. "They are apt to be worse than vagabond Bohemians," he once told Hunter, "only, like ostriches, they stick their heads in the sand of hypocrisy and one may not even suggest that their actions are not hidden also. A set of people that I always liken to a woman I know, who has her husband and lover in her box at the opera every night in the season, and thinks to hide it all by going to church on

Sunday with a massive silver clasped prayer book and the look of a saint."

Van Kever closed the door quickly after his guests, peeped through the curtains into the room on the left, with a certain excitement in his manner, and then walked into the sitting-room and looked at the clock. To be more sure he climbed on a footstool, examined the dial closely, and compared the time with his own watch. He was nervous, his limbs trembled and his lips quivered with suppressed emotion.

"She promised," he murmured, "she promised."

The jar and stir of street life came in through the open windows and fell unheeded upon his ears, as Van Kever threw himself upon a sofa and lay there deep in thought.

The evening was warm, sultry, breathless. The air seemed to throb with his heart beats, as he waited, expectant, and stirred by conflicting ideas.

"Will she come?" he kept thinking, "she said *Friday*. She will come." Then a pause, "But *will* she?" The clock ticked away the minutes; minutes that were spent by him in the ecstasy of anticipation.

Gradually his spirits rose; his conceit prompted him to feel sure of her.

"What would she say when she came in?" he wondered. "Would she look him full in

the face? No—he scarcely thought so. He must be very careful not to omit telling her that his sister and she would be good friends some day. She would probably say: ‘Would you like your sister to be in some man’s rooms as I am in yours?’ They always said that. It was the usual question. He must say no word he might not utter under her father’s roof. He must be careful—he must not be too bold in his wooing!”

He fancied himself greeting her. She would come in without a smile on her face, and he would take her gloves and hat, and sitting beside her, not too near, talk to her—of the weather!

In his mind there lingered faint impressions left by the women who had visited him in these rooms.

“Bah! wantons,” he muttered, angrily.

Nothing so disgusts a man as the woman who *once* pleased him most.

Men want to found their own school of love and passion. They want to teach the lesson themselves, and once it is taught they cannot unteach it.

Ah! there the lesson lies.

The memories of these women of the past seemed to intensify his longing for the woman to come; for none of these past fancies, beautiful, bare-necked, barbaric women would he lift his hand now. They had been too easily attained.

He was done with them, these *gamines* of love’s

by-ways. Margaret's face came to his excited mind. A face with unkissed lips, and pure good eyes, with a clear contrast between the iris and the white, none of that cloudy shading of the two that comes with late hours! Her hands, so soft and white, were the prettier that they were without that foolish polishing and tinting of nails—a habit that reminded him of the demi-monde. This Margaret would teach him pleasures he had forgotten years ago; pleasures such as are rarely known.

He could almost feel her lips clinging to his own.

Her lips! her eyes! her arms!

Her kiss, he felt, would be as strong wine in his veins; he would become drunk in the caress. He rested his head on the edge of the lounge and looked down on a dark spot on the carpet, so that the light might not disturb his thoughts, his arms stretched out above his head, his hands convulsively clutching its sides.

"Sweetheart," he murmured, thickly, "I want to hold you in my arms. I want to"—

The clock struck.

She was not coming!

He felt that he had been cheated, tricked. All the fine fancies he had been feeding his imagination with faded away, and a fact, one brutal fact, stared him in the face. He had dressed up this woman with delicate ideas, but

now she seemed no more to him than the others — of no more value. It was not the woman he had wanted.

It was the experience.

A faint noise outside ; then a knock.

“Come in,” he cries, quickly.

A rustle of a woman’s skirts makes itself heard. Van Kever moves a few steps forward and pauses, his head turned slightly so as to listen more intently. Every swirl of the flounces upon the carpet inspires his imagination.

First an arm clothed in the soft folds of a long Suede glove appears and raising the portière slowly reveals a tall, lithe girl. Her head is bowed in girlish embarrassment.

“I knew you would come,” exclaims Van Kever.

As he takes her hand he notices how pale she is. She is trembling violently as he leads her to a seat ; her fingers are tightly clenched and as they yield unwillingly to his pressure a piece of paper, crumpled and stained, drops from her gloved hand and flutters to the floor.

Van Kever picks it up.

“For you,” she says.

Smoothing the wrinkled sheet so that the writing can be deciphered he reads :

Friday.

I cannot come to you this evening.

No ! I cannot believe that I, Margaret Beale, can so far forget myself.

Even now I see myself knocking at your door, and hear your voice.

I am sure it is best that—

The letter ends abruptly.

“I will stay but a moment,” she says.

Van Kever puts the letter in the loose pocket of his jacket, and taking a photograph from a bracket brings it to her.

“My sister,” he says. She glances at it and does not notice the name of an actress on the margin.

She trembles and hesitates and talks in monosyllables, just as he expected.

“I cannot realize what has brought me here,” she declares repeatedly. She is too young, too good, to know the tricks men practice under the mask of love.

“Why shouldn’t you be here with me. We have but one life to live. Here we can secure happiness, hereafter we know of none,” he answers.

A vivid sheet of white flame suddenly illumines the darkness without and is instantly followed by a thunder-roll that seems to shake the earth. There is a clatter of hoofs, as horses are whipped into greater speed by their drivers. A messenger boy runs shouting along the pavement, to make believe he is frightened.

The hum of the streets accelerates a little, then dies away.

Every one is rushing for shelter from the storm.

"You are frightened?" asks Van Kever, as the lace curtains, caught by a sudden gust of hot wind, flutter into the room and one of them entangles him in its clinging muslin. He extricates himself, and as he closes the window another flash of lightning reveals him in the bluish light of the sudden glare.

For a moment, her nerves strung to their highest tension, Margaret experiences a revulsion of feeling as she watches the misshapen figure, barely tall enough to reach the clasp which fastens the windows.

The shame and danger of her situation momentarily torture her mind, and she is about to escape while his back is turned, in fear and abhorrence of the man, when the crash of thunder numbs her senses and when its force is spent his arm is around her waist and his ardent gaze controls her will.

"It is going to rain; you must stay till the storm has passed," he murmurs, taking her hat and shawl as he speaks.

"The lightning frightens you," he adds, observing the increased pallor of her cheeks.

"Come into the other room. We shall not hear the roar of the storm or see the lightning there."

His touch is magnetic. He seems to absorb a power from the air surcharged with electric force.

"Tell me not to come," she moans, feeling herself under the strange influence that he had cast about her for the first time at Mrs. Rousby's.

"I cannot; I love you—it is fate," she hears him say, as they pass through the hall, and beyond another heavy pair of curtains into an inner room.

As one in a dream she sees and knows everything about her, but she cannot raise her arm to take his hand from her waist, she can only speak in a low, gasping whisper.

"Let me go; you will despise me. I—" but she can say no more, for her head is pressed back and almost smothered in a great soft cushion, her lips are sealed with kisses.

The room is sombre, in keeping with the character of its occupant.

The chiffonnière is the only light spot in the room, and that reflects the taste and fancy of many women.

It is of the Pompadour period, draped in white and tender blue, miniature curtains and a canopy above enclosing the mirror.

In a corner is a peculiarly formed dwarf chair, so made that Van Kever might recline with unusual ease and freedom of limb in his bath-robe after the exhaustion of his morning bath.

Against the wall, hardly visible, a candelabra stands on a bracket in the further corner of the chamber.

Margaret notes these things as she gazed vaguely around the room. There are two windows, heavily curtained, which look out on a narrow courtyard. Suddenly her hands are in his, her head on his arm. Half buried in cushions, he whispers words she leaves unanswered.

The noise of the storm comes faintly to their ears, as if they were in a cave underground, while the rain sounds like the ceaseless murmur of a fountain.

No more troubled protestations from her now. His touch in smoothing her forehead leaves her half dazed.

Gently laying her head upon the cushions he lifts her body in his arms, and the folds of her dress drawn tightly about her form reveal the sinuous outlines as she lies at full length, her eyes half closed. With cat-like tread and feline swiftness Van Kever goes to the front room and extinguishes every light; he pauses in the hallway to securely bolt the door, then he enters the inner room and blows out the shifting flames of the wax candles in the candelabra.

The room is not in total darkness, for suspended against the wall just above Margaret's head is a hideous Japanese mask used by the Japanese

actor to represent villany. Behind it burns a red light, giving a weird glow to the hollow eyes, the grinning jaws, and the red flannel tongue hanging from the cavernous mouth.

It is a fancy of Van Kever's; it has hung there for years and the light behind it burns throughout the night.

Van Kever looks up at it a moment, hesitating; then an evil smile plays about his thin lips and he gives the tongue a pat with his finger and watches it as it sways under the impetus of his touch.

"We look enough alike to be brothers," he mutters to himself grimly.

Lying amid the yellow cushions, her white neck is more beautiful than ever in contrast with the surrounding shadows. Her half closed eyes have lost their lustre, he observes.

He does not hear the clock strike midnight, and all count of time is lost; yet in the first hour of another day his name is forever blotted from the records of Eternity.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PARTING GUN.

"JOHNSON, to-morrow morning I wish you to run down to College Point and have things set in order on the yacht. We will cruise along the Sound while the heat in town is stifling."

"What day will you sail, sir?"

"The day after to-morrow. Say nothing of this to any one. To all callers I am merely out of town. You will accompany us, as usual."

"You will use all the cabins, sir?"

"Yes, I expect to use them all."

These orders were given by Van Kever within a week following the events of the last chapter.

For several days it had become impossible for Van Kever's friends to see him. People going to his office were told he was at his rooms, and there they were informed by Johnson that he was out of town, and yet a person watching the house closely would have noted the appearance of a misshapen figure every now and then at the windows, and also that the valet daily carried a note to a certain house in Madison Avenue.

Leda Atwood, finding that her stay in Lenox would be indefinite, had written to Margaret about it, and Margaret was undecided whether to return home or not, when the next mail brought

a line from Aunt Maitland, announcing her intention to pay an extended visit in New York. The date of her arrival was fixed, so Margaret had engaged rooms in advance and now a week still remained before the aunt was expected. This was the time to be spent on Van Kever's yacht. What castles in the air they made for that week! What happiness it would be! The salt breezes, he wrote, were to bring the roses back to Margaret's cheeks. They were really going to know each other's every thought; and all this in a week.

Yet it was possible, for many an aristocratic Knickerbocker family in New York arranged their first lineage on the foam of the sea; in the *Mayflower*, for instance. That ship, according to tradition, was a highly respectable craft, and it must have carried a very respectable lot of people, judging by the demand there is for association with these emigrants to-day.

The love that was exchanged on the *Mayflower* and the diversions of a pleasure yacht in 1891, differ essentially in respectability, however.

Probably Margaret did not weigh the matter so seriously in her mind when she corresponded regarding the coming trip with Van Kever.

Did she love him?

Who could say! What girl could analyze the qualities of such an experience? He swayed her at will; that was all she knew.

On the morning of the day appointed when

they should sail, a carriage drove up in front of Margaret's house, and looking out of the window she recognized Johnson on the box beside the driver.

Dressed in a white flannel yachting skirt, hidden under a long English coat, she went to the door.

"If my aunt arrives before I return, tell her I have gone away for a few days," she said to the servant, as she hastened down the steps to the carriage.

At the depot she was met by Van Kever, Mrs. Motford and Hunter.

"Where is Miss Atwood?" Hunter asked Margaret. Van Kever answered quickly,

"She was called to Lenox suddenly; her little nephew is ill."

Hunter had accepted Van Kever's invitation with different anticipations. He had come to the depot alone, and the presence of Mrs. Motford surprised him. Taking Van Kever aside, he said :

"Look here! Miss Beale will not stay one day aboard with that Motford woman."

"Oh, yes she will," replied the other. "I've warned Bertie. She's on her good behavior."

Hunter tried to argue more forcibly, but he was interrupted.

"Since when have you turned saint?" cried Van Kever, cynically. "This is a pleasure

party, not a reformer's meeting. Above all things, my dear fellow, avoid the dangers of prudishness. If Bertie has promised to behave, I fancy you can stand it."

Only a short journey by rail was before them to bring them to the yacht's anchorage.

On the train Van Kever became serious.

"One reason I have in taking this cruise," he said to Margaret, "is that on the water I forget my troubles—I forget myself."

"What troubles?" Margaret asked.

"The time may come when I shall not have the power to move, when I shall be utterly helpless. The doctors have spared me no unpleasant truths, you see. A cheerful thing to bid a man wait for a living death, is it not?" Margaret tried to soothe him, but he was as obstinate in his melancholy as he was determined in will.

Mrs. Motford made the most of the short railway journey; she sought to make friends with Margaret.

"How sweet and fresh you look," she said aloud; but, of course, what women say aloud is generally the opposite of what they think, and to herself Mrs. Motford was saying:

"That girl is ill; Van Kever knows it, and he hopes to restore her to health on his yacht, but he won't do it. Men have sacrificed angels before, and lived to make love again over their graves."

"You have been living in Boston?" she asked Margaret.

"Yes, I was learning to paint there," replied Margaret.

"A very good place for art," continued Mrs. Motford, "although one soon learns to paint in New York."

"Have you learned?" asked Margaret, simply. Mrs. Motford nodded her head.

"Landscapes?" pursued Margaret, with interest.

"No; portraits, dear. The highest art acquirement in New York is to paint faces well."

"Ah! that is very difficult," observed Margaret, gravely.

"It is wonderful how soon one learns it, though," continued Mrs. Motford.

"Then I suppose you paint in oils?" said Margaret.

"No, dear, a little rouge, a powder puff, a pencil, and I can produce extraordinary effects in this way in a very few moments."

"Ah! but you need a peculiarly appreciative audience and a certain light to make your art successful," interposed Van Kever.

"Yes; rival artists have told me that I paint most effectively at night," Mrs. Motford answered good humoredly.

"There's a picture!" cried Hunter from his seat across the aisle, as he waved his hand toward the window,

The train was turning a long curve, and revealed a pretty landscape of field and farmland, with the changing colors of the sound waters in the distance. They could see the shore, and a little distance off was a large schooner yacht at anchor.

"Ah! the *Troubadour*," announced Van Kever, pointing to the yacht. Margaret strained her eyes to get a clearer view of the boat.

"I shall change her name and call her Margaret," said Van Kever beside her ear.

"You're not going to fire that horrid gun before we start," interrupted Mrs. Motford.

"Not if you are threatened with hysterics," replied Van Kever, dryly.

"You dear, generous, considerate man," said Mrs. Motford aloud; but fortunately Van Kever could not read her secret comment, for it said:

"You ugly, clumsy, vain idiot! Do you think I am blind and cannot see the motive of this trip. Actually, I am thrilled with a virtuous indignation, a sensation I have not felt since I was first married."

Johnson entered the car to gather the handbags, rugs and numerous traps, as the train steamed up at the station.

A short walk along a winding country road, which narrowed its dusty width to a lane where the grass grew unmolested by engineering or travel led to the water's edge, and the yachting

party wended its way down this road, silently absorbing the freedom and purity of nature, for the expanse of field and woodland, with the smooth waters beyond, make town-bred people realize the poison of city life they have left behind.

An unsteady little jetty extends from the beach, and at the end of it is a smart dingey, with soft cushions and rugs in the stern for the passengers, while two sailors in blue jerseys with the word *Troubadour* worked in white across them, are seated ready to dip their oars.

"The *Troubadour's* chambermaid," says Van Kever, jokingly, as the mate touches his cap and helps the ladies into the boat.

"Your crew are too curious," murmurs Mrs. Motford to Van Kever, when she has arranged her skirts after she has been helped into the boat.

"What can you expect if you will wear variegated hosiery," Van Kever answers slyly.

In a few moments they are gliding swiftly across the water, while Margaret dips her hand into the cool, bluish waves, and is amused in watching the miniature storm of white foam she creates on the surface.

A narrow stairway is lowered from the ship's side, and when the ladies have been assisted from the dingey to the deck by Hunter, Van Kever follows last.

As he steps upon the deck a puff of white

smoke is followed by the dull, heavy report of a cannon. The sound leaps from the bow of the boat, echoing from shore to shore, and as the grayish clouds of smoke clear away sails creak and strain against the breeze and the *Troubadour* moves slowly on.

Margaret leans over the bulwarks in rapt admiration of the scenery.

“For one week you are mine!” a voice whispers to her.

CHAPTER X.

EARLY MASS.

THE following morning dawn broke through a dull, leaden sky.

A heavy mist gathered over the waves, in sullen masses of yellow shapes, and clung to the sides of the yacht, licking, writhing over her decks. So real, so tangible it seemed, that one might think to grasp it in the effort, only to find it steam, fading away, elusive,—a lesson in life.

Owing to the fog the yacht was at anchor.

Through the mist a wandering gull loomed—large, strangely distorted. The dark waves looked as though stretching weird, watery hands to the horizon, then sinking back into the depths dissatisfied. So weird the picture that a fisher-

man passing in his boat might have dreaded to read on the yacht's stern, in awful lettering, the name—"Flying Dutchman,"—and to see a figure striding up and down her decks with silent footsteps—the phantom shape of Philip Vanderdecken.

At seven o'clock there was no stir of life on the little yacht save the anchor watch, who lolled drowsily on the forecastle bulwarks. In the cabin all was very still.

The saloon extended from amidships to the stern on the left of the stairway, taking in the full width of the yacht, and a mast came down through the centre.

In defiance of the sturdy simplicity of its purpose, so well and amply visible above decks, however, it was gaudily decorated in filigree of white and gold, to harmonize with the decoration of the cabin below. At the extreme end was a piano screwed to the saloon deck.

From the bottom of the companion way to its right, and extending from amidships to within half way of the forecastle was a narrow passage-way, and on each side of this corridor were the state-rooms, prettily fitted up with all modern conveniences; the berths being one above the other, a divan across one end of the little room.

The doors could be left half open by means of a strong brass hook, and portières of yellow silk were suspended across the entrances.

The night being warm and close, even this protection had been drawn a little aside, so that the corridor and the state-rooms opposite could be seen from the berths. The port-holes had been left half open, and the swirl of the water lapping the sides of the vessel awoke Margaret with a start. She raised herself on her plump, white arm and her eyes wandered from the leaden sky, just visible through the port-hole, to the cabin opposite where lay Van Kever.

It was a hideous awakening into life.

In the early morning light his face was stamped with the first signs of age, shown in the lines about the neck and eyes.

In the berth above her she could hear Mrs. Motford breathing heavily. With one hand holding her muslin night-gown together about her throat, she raised herself still further forward to look with a strange fascination at the sleeping face of Van Kever. Putting one foot to the floor she listened ; Mrs. Motford still breathed regularly. She crept across the cabin ; the face drew her on—on, until she crossed the corridor and stood beside the sleeper, looking him full in the face. A mad fancy crossed her mind.

From out the future she seemed to draw, to grasp, the features as they would look in age, twenty, thirty years from that July morning. A horror came over her. Before her feverishly active brain, another picture unrolled itself.

The man as she had first seen him.

There arose that first impression, perfect in its entire revolting details.

The eyes could no longer hold her now.

They were closed—in dreams perhaps—but not of her! Pray God not of her!

She trembled; her hand, still holding the gown together, shook nervously; then she quivered and sank down upon her knees and hid her face in her hands.

Finding herself in the position of prayer, mechanically her lips began to move.

“Ave Maria, Ave Maria.” The formula repeated itself over and over again, as at the convent; unmeaningly the prayer had fallen from her lips.

Her school-days come back to her; she was at the house of the “Sacred Heart.” Wearily she droned each prayer through the length of its ten beads, as she had done in the convent chapel on hot summer days.

She prayed again to the Maker who had made him and his sad misshapen form. A tender sympathy rose in her heart.

“O Thou of infinite power,” she prayed, “hear me now. I consecrate my life to this man’s; make him use it for the best. See now, —even before Thy throne, I cling to him, for life—until the end, in sickness and in death. When the living death shall come for him, and

he is stricken helpless, let my devotion appeal for us both. Pity him, and pity me. Thou who hast worked miracles—the miracle of my truth and innocence, and the miracle of its defeat, hear me.” And then in a burst of tears, Margaret strained her eyes into space and her heart gave its last bitter, fleeting cry.

“I have wandered far from the shelter of Thine arms; gather him more closely into them, that I may be saved through him—through him.”

Minutes went by; an hour passed; Margaret’s knees grew stiff, the muscles relaxed, she sank upon the floor. The shock of the fall startled her. The whole surrounding burst upon her, as a monstrous, hideous reality. She was mad. What had she been doing? Praying?

What right had she to pray?

With sudden passionate impulse, leaning over him, she softly kissed the closed eyes.

She reached her cabin dazed, stumbling, she knew not how, and fell prostrate, unconscious, on the floor.

CHAPTER XI.

“FLY-LOO.”

AT one o’clock, everybody on board the *Troubadour* met at luncheon. It cost Mrs.

Motford an effort to be in time. As it was, her toilet looked somewhat unfinished. A stray bath gown Johnson had handed her was hastily pulled over a cambric wrapper; her hair and face were "done." They would have been attended to in case of shipwreck. Mrs. Motford's head was Mrs. Motford's religion, which came in the form of "Morning Service,"—meditation at about five, and vespers at seven. She was more earnest, perhaps, than many people whose religion was of a more strictly orthodox cast.

Margaret was very quiet during the meal. Van Kever watched her furtively. She put aside all questions and offers to be treated as an invalid, by one answer: "No, please do not worry, I am quite well." Her soft hair was drawn loosely back from her white temples, where the slender blue veins were visible. Her face was pale, and showed signs of mental strain. The remembrance of the early morning seemed to her as a dream,—a lurid dream. Mrs. Motford complained of a headache. Whenever she felt a deficiency in her toilet, she always had a headache. Most women have. Van Kever kept her glass constantly filled, which meant a great deal. In a careless, unconscious way, she managed to absorb the contents of a glass before it seemed to touch her lips,—a proceeding with which Van Kever seemed quite familiar.

Before luncheon was over, Mrs. Motford's spirits had attained a pitch of hilarity not often to be met with, even at the black coffee stage of a political dinner in Washington.

She had fallen into that mood when her past became a thing of absolute fascination to her. Pathetically, she related stories of her childhood's days and of the trials and troubles, real or imaginary, she had undergone by becoming Mrs. Motford. One by one, she added to the luxuries of her early home,—a home which, beginning as a modest frame dwelling, developed into a palatial mansion, standing in its own grounds. Van Kever seemed highly amused at the turn affairs had taken. He called to Johnson repeatedly, and bumpers were refilled, Mrs. Motford drinking hers as though it were a sad duty, yet not to be slighted; while Van Kever and Hunter tossed theirs off as men would, who knew they were in a calm off Whitestone and not a tug in sight.

Margaret had long since gone on deck, with a request that she should not be disturbed if she slept. From under the clear eye of her charge, Mrs. Motford expanded, becoming more confidential and retrospective every moment.

The flies hovered in black clouds over the remains of the fruit.

Van Kever took three lumps of sugar from a silver basin on the table, and putting them on

separate plates, handed them round, suggesting that they should choose their favorite *liqueurs*. Hunter laughed.

"Fly-loo," he said. "Great fun. Eh, Mrs. Motford?"

Mrs. Motford folded her arms, and looked reflectively at the lump of sugar before her, and murmured, "maraschino." Hunter took "green Chartreuse." Van Kever took Benedictine.

Motionless, they watched their baits, as though the fate of nations depended on the result. Mrs. Motford's milliner's bill in Paris was up with Van Kever on the chance of a fly, who was creeping lazily between the two plates. To Van Kever, it meant a few dollars, lost or won. To Mrs. Motford, her milliner's bill.

The fly's tiny head turned curiously each way, hesitating. Mrs. Motford's spirits rose. Suddenly, it noticed Hunter and his green Chartreuse, and its wiry little legs ran merrily across to him, in anticipation of a great treat.

It carried away, on its ugly black back, Mrs. Motford's latest account with "Elise." Yes; a dozen bonnets went capering off with its nimble feet.

"Beast!" muttered she, as the insect stood staring at Hunter.

"Good boy!" the hero of the green Chartreuse cried.

Van Kever looked on quietly. He felt sure

of the result. The fly wheeled about and ran straight to the Benedictine, in which it revelled for a moment, flew dizzily away, and returned to become gloriously unconscious of any other fly on earth.

Van Kever had won. Ah! more flies than this in his web! The game now lay between Mrs. Motford and Hunter.

That lady's star was in the ascendant; the fly settled on her sugar and she won.

The cabin grew hotter every minute, and a swarm of flies gathered drunkenly about the *liqueurs*, and staggered up and down the sugar cliffs. One fell motionless into Mrs. Motford's plump, white hand. A couple who had been good fly-friends buzzed noisily at each other and parted, one to remain motionless, the other to creep away, hesitate, look and come back, only to find himself forgotten. How like men and women, these! The color left Hunter's face as he said:

"It is close here," and he put his hand to his head.

"Let us go on deck," suggested Van Kever.

Mrs. Motford swayed unsteadily as she rose, and they stumbled clumsily up the narrow companion way, while Johnson followed them closely.

They found Margaret asleep.

A slight breeze had sprung up. Mrs. Motford, to amuse herself, threw pillows at Van

Keever, which he laughingly dodged, as he said :

"Hunter, light a cigarette for Mrs. Motford."

But Hunter's pride had fallen, and he no longer pretended to be in what is known as "good fettle."

"I couldn't," he briefly remarked, "not if my life depended on it."

The sailing master came aft.

"There's a fine wind risin'. It'll be a nice sailing breeze pretty soon," he said.

"Get her under way," Van Kever answered, "we've had enough of Whitestone for to-day."

"Aye, aye, sir!—All hands up anchor!" In ten minutes the little yacht was flying merrily across the water,—dashing the foam from her prow, over the party on the deck. One wave showered its silvery spray over Mrs. Motford's bath gown.

"Whose is it?" she asked, as she lifted up the wet sleeve for Van Kever's inspection.

"It was left on board a month ago, and has a history that would make a good plot for a novel."

"Better tell it to Miss Beale," Hunter suggested. "I believe she writes, and she might do it up very gracefully and call it, 'The tale of a Bath Gown!' Women can do that sort of thing better than men."

"There won't be much left to tell a tale of, if a few more of these waves splash over it," Mrs.

Motford exclaimed, as she bent far over the side of the vessel, and stared vacantly into the water.

Hunter fell into a heavy doze.

In leaning too far over, Mrs. Motford's hat dropped overboard, and floated away. Suddenly, through the stillness, a woman's voice trilled into a little, odd, old French *chansonnette*.

She sat, bareheaded, singing—

*“Avez-vous vu le cha—le cha—
Avez-vous vu le peau—le peau,
Avez-vous vu le cha-a-peau—
De Mademoiselle Zo-Zo!”*

The hat sailed away on the waves, a dainty nest for a wandering sea-bird!

“Avez-vous vu le cha—le cha,” the woman's voice rang out.

Avez-vous vu le peau—le peau.”

The song died brokenly away. The singer looked dreamily at Margaret.

“It is so hard,” she said, “to be a chaperon,” and a tear rolled down her cheek.

Her plump, pretty hand held her handkerchief, a cobweb trifle, over the railing.

“Be careful, or that will follow the chapeau of Mlle. Zo-Zo,” Van Kever said, reaching for it.

“No! leave it with me.”

“Well! be careful then.”

“Careful?—one would think I didn't know what I was doing.”

"I didn't say that."

"But you think it," angrily.

No reply.

"Do you think it?—do you?"

Van Kever lit her a cigarette, for answer.

She threw it into the water. Truly, some one besides the flies was suffering.

The handkerchief followed the cigarette.

"Come now, Bertie, be sensible. This is downright wasteful; wasteful!"

"Wasteful?—I'll show you!"

The dressing-gown followed the handkerchief in its quick flight overboard. Van Kever turned his head away; his indifference to her temper roused the now unreasonable woman to a pitch of frenzy. Seizing her shoe she cast it far out into the waves defiantly, wildly singing:

*"Avez-vous vu le sou—le sou !
Avez-vous vu le lier—le lier ?
Avez-vous vu le sou-ou-lier—
De Mademoiselle Zo-Zo !"*

Hunter awoke ; these sounds confused him, and he wondered vaguely where he was.

Margaret lay there with staring eyes.

The other slipper flew after its mate, and with clenched hands, red with passion, the frantic woman began to tear the cambric wrapper off her shoulders.

"Johnson," called Van Kever, "Mrs. Motford."

Hearing her name, she looked Van Kever in the face—something in his eyes held her.

When Johnson appeared, she went below with him quite peacefully. She might do “scenes” for her friends; for their valets, never!

Throwing herself carelessly on a sofa, she said, with an air of much *nonchalance*:

“The wind is too strong on deck.”

As she raised her smelling salts, Johnson seemed to be rummaging in a cupboard for impossible things, and really was watching the companion way slyly, lest she should escape.

His *ruse* did not deceive Mrs. Motford, though she smiled pleasantly at him.

“Great change in the weather, Johnson?”

“Yes; ma’am.”

“For the better, Johnson?”

“For the better, ma’am.”

CHAPTER XII.

FOR HIS SAKE.

ALL day long there had been a threatening anger in the elements, and soon after the sailing master had given orders to proceed he was very much in doubt as to whether it would not be safer to put into an inlet or harbor.

It was a land breeze growing gradually into a

gale of strong proportions. The passengers on the yacht did not notice this, however.

Margaret had seen everything that had passed on deck ; from Mrs. Motford's *solo* to her ignominious disappearance. Van Kever noticed that her eyes were open wide-awake.

"I hope you feel better," he said ; "will you come over here by me?"

She did not stir.

"I might not interest you. I cannot favor you with the *Chapeau of Mlle. Zo-Zo*."

"Oh, forget that ! Bertie has had a little too much luncheon, you know."

"I might have expected this," she continued.

"What do you mean?"

"I knew you would find me stupid," she answered ; "and yet this cruise was arranged only that I might be with you." She grew suddenly pale.

"Are you ill?" he asked.

"No."

"Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Take me back to town."

"Why, we're all going back in a couple of days. I have some business to attend to then. Anything else?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Go away."

"Where to? A yacht is a small place. Why do you want to land to-day?"

"Why? Do you think I am blind?"

He looked at her with a fixed gaze.

Slowly she came to him.

"Do you think I shall be like that woman at thirty-five?"

"I hope not."

"Did you will me to come to you?"

"Yes."

"I didn't want to come—"

"I knew it."

"Sometimes I hate you."

"That's why I like you."

"In time you will have ceased—to care."

"You are morbid to-day; it is the weather, dear." Then, after a pause: "How can I tell what our feelings will be in time to come! only, I am sure you will never be like that woman."

"What other way is there out of it?" she asked, bitterly. "Women have pains to lose, to forget, as well as men; their faults make them hard and reckless like her."

"Some women are braver than others," said Van Kever, seriously. "No life is impossible for a woman like yourself. You are brilliant, handsome, young; there is much happiness for you in the world if you choose it wisely."

"I cannot, while I think of you."

"Forget me!" he answered, as though momentarily conscience urged him to regret the past and sacrifice himself in self-punishment. It was only momentary, however; for like most men of the world his virtue came in spasms, and came rarely. They were not dangerous, these spasms; there was not sufficient agony in them to kill.

He looked at Hunter to see if he still slept, and then kissed her. Words came to her lips, but she held them back; she was growing wiser now. A horrible wisdom to learn, this,—a worldly woman's wisdom; the wisdom of checking impulsive thoughts, for craft, and leaving the heart quite out of the question. Tears sprang to her eyes. Listlessly, she picked up a book and bowed her head over it.

As Van Kever took it from her, the look of pain in her face escaped him; even if it had not, what did he care! Why should a man care that one woman was unhappy—was sorrowing? There were plenty more that seemed happy ones. Why should a man want tears of love, when he can get smiles—bought?

The book she had been reading was Celia Thaxter's "Sea Poems," and on the fly leaf was traced in a school-girl hand, "Convent of the Sacred Heart, New Orleans, Margaret Beale," and below the name a few verses were written.

"Yours?" Van Kever asked.

"Oh yes, but written long ago at school; I was younger then," and she reached out her hand for the book. But Van Kever held it from her as he read aloud the lines—

A SEA SONG.

"I watch from my skiff the sea's gray skies,
The shore is still, no wild bird cries,
I dream of a love that is coming to me;
Send him, O Mother, 'Star of the Sea!'

"The waves of Time o'er my fond heart break,
My life is holy for *one man's sake*,
For a love that is coming, that is to be!
How soon? O, Mother, 'Star of the Sea.'"

As Van Kever finished reading, Margaret remained motionless; she had lost herself in the past. She had kept her life holy for his sake! He was the man who had come. Involuntarily the words sprang from his lips:

"God! how awful!"

Between two of the pages a little ribbon lay to mark verses; on it, in faint letters, was traced the word "Elsie."

Van Kever looked at the marker inquiringly.

"My sister's name," she said, briefly. "You may keep the book if you wish."

He took the marker and, putting it over the lines she had written, handed it back to her.

"You might want to read the poem again some day," he said.

She took it.

"Which means that when you are tired of me I shall stake all again on some other man. No! A woman can't keep her life holy twice."

He pushed back her head and kissed her soft, fair throat.

"I will keep the book. It will always be a pleasure for me to look at it. It will make me feel that you belong to me."

She leant her cheek against his hand.

"It is too late to take back the gift. I do belong to you—willingly or unwillingly, I belong to you."

Overhead little clouds crept together, weaving black curtains, while the water grew rough and the boat lurched heavily. Van Kever's iron grasp held Margaret from sliding along the deck, and he begged her to go below; but she pleaded:

"Let me stay with you. I don't want to go down in the cabin."

Van Kever dismissed the quarter-master, who was steering, and took the helm himself. The man touched his cap and went below.

The waves dashed in Margaret's face; her hair had fallen wet on her shoulders and blew across Van Kever's lips.

He kissed it, as a black wave hissed over them.

The fury of the storm came upon them with a sudden burst.

"All hands slack sheets," shouted Van Kever, as he put the helm hard down.

The canvas flapped and rustled, and the blocks creaked as the little yacht, relieved from the press of sail, labored up in the wind. As she came up, a mountain of water crashed over her decks, carrying away the quarter boat.

Margaret clung to Van Kever, drenched.

The rain began beating mercilessly down.

Margaret watched Van Kever's face, set in a grim determination, giving him the fierce look of an angry mastiff. The violence of the squall increased; with danger, perhaps death, staring them in the face, she was calm.

Van Kever's voice reassured her.

The scene of the afternoon was swept away from her mind by the waves. She was facing danger, and with the man who was closer to her than all other men.

The yacht reeled and plunged between two seas.

Johnson staggered forward, and carried her below forcibly. She knelt in the companion way, within Van Kever's call.

Mrs. Motford screamed to her from the far end of the cabin,

"Pray for me! come to me! help me! pray for me!" but Margaret answered her, roughly:

"I can't help you; pray for yourself."

Hunter strove, in his excited way, to calm and comfort the two women.

Suddenly the vessel stood on end; then, with a roar of the waves, it sank in the trough of the sea.

Looking up Margaret saw the place at the wheel—vacant. Crawling up the steps, she dragged herself upon the deck. Her hands groped in the darkness; he was there!

“Thank God! Thank God!” She would not be left to live with his life struggling itself out in the sea.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EBB TIDE.

MRS. MAITLAND had not arrived when Margaret returned to town. Her system had been severely shocked by the experiences of the storm, and although many days had passed in feverish delirium, under the care of a trained nurse, since the *Troubadour* was towed into Whitestone, disabled and crippled as its owner, she was permitted one morning to read a note from *him*.

“MY DARLING:

“I hear you have been seriously ill, but the servant brings news that you are better this morning. I leave to-morrow

for a last sail on the *Troubadour*. The doctors have warned me again, and I feel that on the water I may forget my fate. When I return I expect to find you entirely well.

“Till then,

“Yours,

“R. VAN KEEVER.”

She had been expecting to see him, to feel his touch, during the rational intervals of her sickness each day. The egotism of his note, and the almost indifferent reference to her own trouble escaped her notice.

It was a sudden joy to receive even a letter from him—too sudden for her delicate condition, and a relapse followed, during which she lay almost unconscious for three weeks.

The young doctor who attended her, in obedience to her wishes, wrote nothing of Margaret's illness to her mother. She was safe yet, she thought, and there would be time enough.

One morning, for the first time since her illness, Margaret picked up a newspaper and glanced over it. It was filled with accounts of a cyclone on the water—those depths in which she had so nearly found her death. She shuddered at the remembrance. Then, suddenly, her thoughts flew to Van Kever; fascinated she read on:

“Wrecks of several vessels have drifted ashore! Among those missing is the schooner yacht “*Troubadour*;” Owner—Robert Van Kever!”

With set face and rigid grasp, she held fast to the paper and read on :

“Further details of the storm at sea.”

The paragraphs were written with terrible power of description and prolonged, cruel detail; written, doubtless, by a journalist who was master of the cunning of his craft. If she could but look into Van Keever's life—but see him now; was he drifting away, helpless, far out to sea?

She fancied she could see the waves washing over him—moving his body to and fro—rolling and tumbling it in their ghastly play. It was horrible!

Of all deaths, it seemed most sad and abandoned to her. He had faced it once by her side—but alone! why had he gone back?

She sent a note to his brother, asking what news he had heard, and waited all day for the answer. None came. That was on Monday. On Wednesday, at five o'clock, a servant brought a card to her. As she reached for it her hand fell helpless at her side. She dreaded to look at it. The small square of card-board might be a death warrant. She stared blindly at it. The small lettering swam before her eyes.

“*Mr. James Van Keever.*”

His brother!

Yes, it was the death warrant. He was dead or he would have been with her.

How still and lifeless seemed the day. Life must be kept busy and eventful for her now that he was dead.

There came to her the memory of a friend of hers, whose husband was brought home killed.

At the time she had wondered how it must seem to be a widow. Now she knew. She was a widow, too, only her widowhood was a nameless one. She could not claim the world's pity, because it must never know her grief. It was easy to bear the grief the world knew of, but it was hard to have the living dead about you—dead whom you could not bury, because the world must never know they are dead to you.

She put her hands to her throbbing head and looking up, saw that a man stood on her threshold. She read the message in his face—no hope.

How much he looked like Robert—like his brother—curiously alike about the forehead and mouth; she caught herself wondering if the mother's forehead was like his, where the hair grew from the temples. He was not handsome, this brother; she was glad of that. The mother could not have loved him more than the other.

They were not fine men, these two sons of hers. The mother must know it, but then they were *hers*—her boys—that made the difference.

"If word had been sent from your brother you would be the first to know," she said.

"Yes. No word has been sent yet," he answered,—"but we hope—that is, my mother hopes, to hear some favorable news to-day."

"Do you think she will?"

"No; I hope the yacht was sea-worthy when he sailed in her; he had great faith in the builder who overhauled her after a gale she was in a few days ago.

A gale? Oh yes, she could tell him of that gale—of that storm that would not take them both together, but waited. Even death is cruel often times.

Suddenly she remembered that the man before her was a perfect stranger to her, and she had not even asked him to sit. She pushed a chair forward.

"But for one moment," he said. "I must go to the mother." Looking down in her lap, she saw a package of letters lying there.

"They are from you; I found them at his place—among some papers," he said.

Margaret took one of them up mechanically, and her eyes met these words, in the middle of a page.

"I have no courage to live for myself. I have to live my life out through you. See through your eyes, think your thoughts. I cannot ask you to pity me—you of all men." She looked up.

"I know," the brother said.

Trembling, she held out her hand to him, and nature's great friendly twilight covered them both.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ANGELUS!

NEW YORK was just astir, when Margaret awoke on the morning following the report of Van Keever's death. Above the noise and murmur of the streets, sounding clear and distinct in the first breath of morning air, the church bell of a Catholic chapel doled out in quick, sharp monotones the invitation to prayer, the call to early mass. There was no soft harmony or sacred melody in its ring; it was the religious alarm, catching sinners before they had time to forget confession, calling them to kneel with a priest before they entered the snares of worldly toil and pleasure.

Margaret listened to it for some time. At first it sounded like a ship's bell tolling the watches; then her thoughts flew to the painful recollection of love's widowhood, and then her whole life seemed dull and empty as she realized that *he* was dead.

Her light of love had gone out; she must wander on in the dark shadow of her secret, a bondswoman chained to the dead.

Was this love? she thought.

Was this all the reward? Did women laugh, and envy and wait and yield their lives to this all seeing love, only to suffer like this?

Had her mother ever felt as wretched, she wondered. Then an angel-thought in her mother's face shed a glorious, gentle light upon her mind, as if from a rent in the skies it shone straight from the Throne of Grace.

"Love is shame sometimes," the mother-angel murmured, "but temptation comes to all, its sins can be cleansed by repentance."

With quick, short, hollow reiteration of clanging sound the bell seemed to come nearer, till in fancy it hung over her bed and cried with its clear, brazen voice:

"Re—pent! Re—pent! Re—pent!"

The bell had ceased ringing, when, a few hours later, Margaret went out into the street and after a short walk entered the Convent of the Ascension.

The lay sister at the door led the way into the parlor, and went in search of the Mother Superior. Presently she stood in front of her again. What an unearthly way these women had of gliding about!

"The Reverend Mother is very busy just now; is it important that you should see her to-day?"

"Yes. Please tell her, Sister—"

"Sister Angeline," interrupted the little nun, excitedly. It was such an event, to show some

one in from the outside world. It was always an epoch in her life.

"Thank you, Sister. "Will you tell the Reverend Mother, from me—Margaret Beale—that I wish to see her about receiving instructions? I—I—wish to enter the church."

"I will indeed, with oh, such happiness! Are you a convert then?"

"I hope to be."

"Our Blessed Lady sends us many such." At this moment a few people came into the convent parlor from the chapel. "Will you come with me, Miss Beale?"

Margaret followed the sister into a small, bare room.

"I brought you here that you might talk quietly," said the little nun, as she fluttered away to hasten the Mother. To save souls one should hurry!

Left to herself, Margaret looked about the room. The floor was bare; the pine boards white and spotless. Beside a deal table a plaster cast of St. Joseph stood within a niche. About the place little images of saints in gayly colored robes were grouped.

Margaret had spent two years of her life in a convent.

Not that she was a Catholic, but because the education and care of the brave, disciplined nuns made good and clever women.

There are exceptions to this, but they are rare ; so rare, in fact, as to make these exceptions truly noteworthy.

How this room brought back the past, the convent past, to Margaret. The oft said prayers, her favorite teacher, Sister Louise of the Cross, and the ugly nun who scolded—Sister Veronica—and Father Paul, who, having solemnly promised not to convert her, contented himself by giving her his rosary, and asking her prayers to the Blessed Lady, for the world's return to the true faith, and the further good of his soul. How the little room brought back the mood of those days: the girlish ambitions she had cherished then; the time when her first verses and stories were written: of her mother's joy in reading her rhymes; and how she had cherished the dream of writing a book, a first book, and wondered how her thoughts would look in print; and when it should be done, her mother would softly cry as she saw its dedication," "To my mother," and the tale should be of love—great love—tender love—the love a mother has for her child. She looked about her. Was it all to end in this? Was it not sinful to bring the ruins of life to God, because the beauty had been taken from it by a creature of his own creation? And was it renunciation?—what had she to renounce? There was, at least, more peace in a convent among God's women than in the world

of women like her. The Mother Superior came in, a tall, sweet-faced woman with the habitual smile of the nun. As she held out her hand, an untimely thought came to Margaret of having heard it said: but two classes of women smile through life, it being taught them with their avocation, the nun and the dancer. Margaret shook off the wicked thought with a shudder. Ah! it is when we try most to be good that such ideas come to us. The Mother Superior drew a hard, pine chair close to her visitor and seated herself.

"Sister Angeline," she began, "tells me that you wish to talk of receiving instruction with a view to joining the church. Who sent you to us?"

"I—I—hardly know. I came." Could she tell this holy woman her lover had been the cause of her visit?

"Strange! You have been brought up a Protestant?" asked the Reverend Mother.

"Yes, but I was at a convent in New Orleans for two years, although not a Catholic. I had a wish to be at the time; but my mother and family opposed it, and afterwards, when I had the power to follow my own wishes more fully, I seemed to have grown out of the idea."

"Ah, yes,"—the Mother shook her head. "I see! other influences were brought to bear; other surroundings worked the change. At which convent were you in New Orleans?"

“At the Convent of the Sacred Heart.”

“Ah, yes,”—the Mother’s face lit up. “They have a lovely place there, truly! They will be happy to know that your future life is turning back to its early teaching. If you will come to me to-morrow at this time, I will let you know at what hour you can receive instruction; and I think now of a Sister who will take a delight in helping you. She has a vocation for converts. Indeed, she will be very happy.”

“Are *you* happy?” The words forced themselves from Margaret’s lips. The Reverend Mother looked at her in grave surprise. “The peace of God,” she began, “and faith in his promises”—The set phrases died away on her lips at the look of utter weariness in the face of her listener.

“I don’t think I meant that,” the girl said; “I meant, are you in peace?”

“Life is busy here, for me, at all times. The life of a religious is not an easy one, but I can truly say, I find peace; great peace,—the peace of God which passeth all understanding.”

“I am looking for that peace, too,” Margaret half whispered. “Help me; if I can believe, as I pray to do, I may yet find the way to your happiness.”

“If God sent you a vocation for this life,” answered the Mother, “He will give you the faith to follow it. Were you content at the convent?”

“ Yes ; I was happy, then.”

“ Are you not happy now ? ”

“ No ! ”

“ Have courage, my child. God will lighten your burden. Will you come into the chapel to ask our dear Lord’s blessing on this undertaking ? ”

Together they passed through the door—the nun and the girl ; the mother and the daughter : the mother long since dead to suffering ; the daughter, her heart inflamed with misery. Both women ; both thinking to live without the heart. A little shell-shaped dish fastened against the side of the wall held holy water, and in it lay a sponge—that the font might never be dry. Standing behind the Mother, Margaret noticed how deeply she sunk her white fingers in the sponge, that she might reach the precious water.

Passing onward, they knelt on the hard ground side by side. What histories these two could tell ! What a story of crushed hopes and iron bound discipline told itself in the prayerful face of the mother. She had conquered this mystery called life, with as strong faith in a hereafter as a mother has in the goodness of her children. The woman beside her had it all to learn. The nun prayed with unmoved lips ; but Margaret murmured to herself, as she bowed her head low, and yet lower :—

“Lord, I believe! Help thou mine unbelief.” A smell of incense was in the place. A clock counted out the hour: one hour nearer eternity for the world; one hour nearer heaven for the nun. For the infidel—one hour nearer the end.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CONVENT.

TWO weeks had passed in religious contemplation since Mārgaret knelt before the convent altar. During the whole period she was alone, her aunt, being unavoidably detained—busied in household cares.

To an extent, Margaret had already yielded to the influence of the convent, for she read only those books recommended by the nun whom she was with almost every day.

She sent one last letter to James Van Kever, saying that there need be no answer, if there was no news. The letter was one, more of condolence than of injury; no word came from him. The sea gave back no answer. She looked at no papers, nor tortured her mind with hopes or fears, but buried that part of her life deep down in her heart. One Sunday, she was asked to spend the day at the country retreat of the Convent of Ascension, and she went.

How wonderful it seemed to her, this monastery of women's lives, this beautiful monument of faith, not defying love of the world but waiting till experience had brought its stings, till love had ruined and crippled some woman too gentle to withstand the cunning theories and fashions of the world; ever ready waiting were these women with prayers, and penitence, with incense and altar, to make all women sisters in chastity and faith.

Summer was passing away, and it was one of those glorious days that like gorgeous heralds follow the pageant of harvest and fruits to cry out, "Remember what has gone by; it will cheer you when that cold, heartless winter comes."

How peaceful it all seemed. What might not a few weeks spent here in absolute quiet, do for her? She would ask the Mother Superior. Down a narrow walk, roughly paved, where the dreary age had been assailed by the fresh, young grass and soft moss peeping between the stones, she saw the nun, one hand upon the little crucifix that hung suspended from her neck, the other holding a prayer book. Her head was bent over its pages, and shafts of golden sunlight struggled through the thick foliage and made an even stairway of light amid the heavy shade.

She looked up when Margaret asked her the question. With pleasure; the sisters would be glad to shelter her sorrow, to nurture her heart

during its pain in the quiet sacred walls of the retreat. That night she returned to town, and made hasty preparations to enter the convent for a while. Thoughtfully, she wrote to her mother, giving but a slight explanation of her intentions. "In a few weeks," she wrote, "I shall be with you. I have much to tell you that I cannot easily write." Yes, some things are better told than written. It is a serious matter, I realize, when mother and daughter choose separate paths to God."

She touched lightly upon her frequent visits to the convent, but said nothing of the retreat in store for her. A letter was also dispatched to her aunt, telling her that it was better that she should remain where she was for the present ; as she had been so long delayed in coming, it was quite as well to wait and join her in the country with her mother. Then the pain of putting all dainty girlish things away ; all unnecessary toilet trifles,—she had grown to have a distaste for them now. She was done with them—as the world seemed now. The dress baskets held gowns she might never see again ; and these, the Indian mull night robes, the delicate lace petticoats, the cob-web silk stockings, these were all to be folded away, as the clothes might be of some one who had just died, and the time had come for their reminders to be hidden from sight. There is no time in life for the dead !

A picture fell from the tray of a trunk. It was of the woman who held it in her hand, but a picture taken in another life. A smiling girl's face looked out from the likeness. The arms were uncovered, and a leopard's skin was wrapped around her, showing glimpses of bare shoulders. It had been a fancy of the artist to pose her in this way, for a delicate pastel he had made of her. She carried the picture to the furthest corner of the room, and sitting down looked fixedly at it.

The color came and went in her face as she gazed. The woman who looked at her from the picture had laughing eyes, and a smile, a careless happy smile, about the mouth. She tore the likeness into pieces, and held its edges in the flame of the gas, till the card-board curled up and smouldered slowly away. The purple paper, half colored with flame, fell from her hand to the floor. One of her fingers was scorched. The embers of the picture gave their last flicker before death, and the carpet catching the blaze, smouldered in ever increasing rings of fire. The startled woman ran for a cloak that lay across a chair, and throwing it over the smoke pressed it down with her hands, hurriedly, burning them still more. When the fire was quite out, she threw the cloak aside and looked at her singed hands. "So love and youth cost," she said. The black scraps on the carpet

wavered in the heated air, and blew away. "How different from what I look now," she murmured.

* * * * *

At last every trunk was packed. There were five in all. Why should a woman have five trunks! One was enough, and that of the plainest kind. Ah! what a sway the present time had over her. Was it a religion? Was it a mood? Was it trying to get nearer to God—or to escape from herself? The gas flickered low. The light of the candle died out, as the lid was closed on the last trunk. The memory of one Margaret Beale seemed to her to die away, too. Would she awaken to life?—or to a living death!

Picking up a prayer book, she opened it at the litany. It was better to read this prayer of a merciful death, than to speculate on what might follow. It was a special litany, contained in all Catholic prayer books.

She read a part of it: "When my imagination, agitated by dreadful spectres, shall be sunk in an abyſs of anguish; when my soul, affrighted with the sight of my iniquities and terror of Thy judgments shall have to fight against the angel of darkness who will endeavor to conceal thy mercies from my eyes, and to plunge me into despair."

(The *Response*) "Have mercy on me!"

"When my poor heart—"

She put the book down for the night. Her heart could feel no litany now; it had yielded to idolatry and as the idol had been destroyed, her love and faith were crushed.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ETE, MISSA EST.”

THE days of the retreat went by almost peacefully. The morning sun shone on a narrow, stone-paved path on which the sisters were in the habit of walking daily, and here Margaret spent much of her time. By every kind and loving care, these women, living lives of sacrifice, tried to infuse a little brightness into the life newly come among them. She had asked for a fortnight's retreat, and on the following Monday, when that time would have come to an end, she intended to leave for her home, that she might tell her family of her plans. She dreaded the waking into life that would be forced upon her in making this journey, now only three days off. Fasting and wakefulness were telling on her, and on Sunday morning she awoke feeling very ill. However, she arose early and was told that Mrs. Maitland was waiting to see her in the parlor. She welcomed her aunt quietly, as a being from another world. Mrs. Maitland hid her face in

her handkerchief and sobbed brokenly. It is a terrible thing to see a woman of sixty cry. It seems that at that age, the troubles and tragedies of life should be over. So thought Margaret, as the sight of her aunt's grief broke down the mental barrier that had made itself felt between them.

"Don't, dearie," she begged, "don't, aunt. I can't bear to see you like this!" and dropping her head on her aunt's shoulder the two women sobbed in each other's arms. A priest put his head inquiringly in at the door, peered about, drew back, and walked up and down the narrow corridor, looking from under his downcast eyelids, each time he passed the glass panelled entrance to the parlor.

Mrs. Maitland was the first to regain her composure. She gently stroked her niece's bright hair, and listened to the weary sound of her sobbing.

"Margaret," she said, "I believe you are ill; you look wretched and feeble; come back to the hotel with me. How could you write me not to join you! This idea of not wanting your own about you is morbid. I trust that there never will come the time when we shall be separated, at least not until you are married."

"Ah! but aunt dear, there will come such a time, and soon too; but don't let us speak of that now." The little gray-haired lady, a lady that

we, of no school at all, call "of the old school,"—a lady from the toe of her boot to the majestic lavender tip of her bonnet—looked round the room disapprovingly.

"How long have you been here?"

"Two weeks, nearly."

"Child, child! no wonder you look pale; and what ever drove you to this place is more than I can conceive. I am not here to reproach you. We all have," said the old lady mysteriously, "our faults. You shall come back to town with me and we will forget and forgive."

Margaret drew away from her aunt. "I cannot understand," she said, passionately, "why I should be treated as though I had committed some crime, in coming here. I leave for home to-morrow, that my mother may be told what I intend to do. Till then I shall remain here, except to go to St. Francis Xavier's church, this morning. I will meet you wherever you like after the Mass, on my way back."

Mrs. Maitland looked at her with a sweet smile, and kept the tears back. She knew her niece too well not to instantly change her manner. "Very well, my dear; but I couldn't think of meeting you after the—service. I am not a bigoted woman. I will go with you myself, and then you must have a bit of luncheon with me and we'll talk it all over."

Reluctantly, she assented, and together they

took the train, and were soon passing up the aisle of one of New York's loveliest churches—“ St. Francis Xavier's.” Margaret felt ill on the train, and by the time the church was reached, she was glad to lay her head in her hands, and rest—only to rest. She could not pray to-day ; for some reason her mind was untuned to prayer.

How strong the smell of incense ! Impassively she listened to the Mass, the one, beautiful, grand, awful thing left us on earth ; the one thing the pollution of the nineteenth century let pass. In its inviolateness lies its spell. The voices of countless ages intoning the surging waves of its cadences to the Holy Trinity of faith, as they had done to the Trimusti of our Aryan Forefathers, to the sun gods of Chaldea, Egypt, Phoenicia, Greece and Rome. So long as the incense floated in the air and men and women knelt, what matter to whom. The sea of the Mass bringing on its tide canticles of unutterable beauty, upturned faces of martyrs, who live but in the glory of their names, the vaporous clouds of billowing incense mingled their shapes and formed a smoky dome above the heads of the people. Mrs. Maitland secretly pressed her violet scented handkerchief to her nostrils. Margaret, kneeling by her side, looked waxy white, the color of a candle on an altar near by ; her lips were pale, and a burning fever gleamed in her cheeks. Her eyes had the brilliancy of light on

water. The prayer book she held seemed to her fancy to vary its shape in her swelled hands. Where was she? The time and place seemed slipping from her, and racking pains darted through her limbs. From far above, the choir burst into the "*Credo in unum Deum patrem Omnipotentem Factorem Coeli et terrae.*" Ah! she was in church; she remembered now. The sacrifice had reached the supreme moment—the adoration, the elevation of the Sacred Host. A hush fell upon the kneeling people; all heads were bent save those of strangers to the creed and Margaret's. She watched with unnaturally gleaming eyes the sun rayed Pyx, as it was raised aloft by the priest. Was it the host he held before her? No! not the host—a boat! a boat! she could see it plainly, she told herself, and it was covered with sea weed, and green, glistening slime, and the boat rested in space! Its oars drifted—drifted away; a man clung to its side. See, see! now he rises, and gains a hold! If but the boat would right itself! He climbs to the keel, and his face is the wet face of Van Kever. The waves gathered up and lifted their watery fingers, with foam for the nails, to push him back and laugh little, hollow, lapping laughs of ripples that break over him! He falls back, but gains the boat again, and it swirls around with him till he loses his grasp, and sinks down—down—down—into—the altar!

"No, no," she moaned out, "why should he follow me here? Her aunt, startled, shook her by the shoulder, but she whispered—"Look! He's sinking in the waves." She fell to the bench and they carried her in delirium to the vestry room beyond. She now lost complete sense of her surroundings. All grew dark around her. Greatly alarmed, Mrs. Maitland ordered that a carriage be summoned. The sufferer was assisted to it and they drove rapidly to the Hotel Salars, where Margaret was put to bed and a nurse sent for. So it was that Margaret Beale did, after all, stay in town with her aunt.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT IS LOVE?

DR. WERNER was a specialist on nervous diseases. A man with clear, deep set eyes, a tall, graceful figure with a certain latent strength in his movements. A man whose knowledge and practice had made him a stern philosopher, a fair and honest judge of human nature and an admirer of character.

The autumn was fast shifting into winter, but in his cosy study the seasons were defied, for the warm, cheery fire only increased the pleasures of winter, and the little alcoved con-

servatory, lighted with the red glow from crimson globes, maintained the verdure of spring, the perfume of summer. A knock at the door interrupted his reverie and a servant announced Dr. Scudder.

The latter was a young man, just building up a practice in the same field as the great specialist. "Glad to see you!" he said, as the younger man entered brusquely and sat down.

"Doctor, I am here for advice," he said abruptly.

"My consultation hours are over, but if your case is urgent—"

"It is important: it means life or death." Dr. Werner flipped the ashes of his cigar into the grate and raised his eyebrows sceptically. These young men were so impetuous, they rushed at conclusions so hastily.

"Two months ago, I was at dinner," began Dr. Scudder, "when a colored boy brought me a message. I recognized him at once as coming from patients of mine, a family living in Madison Avenue. I was urgently wanted.

"'Who is ill?' I asked the boy; 'one of the family?'

"'No; a young lady, a visitor at the house,' he told me. I went over at once and found a young girl, left quite alone in the absence of an aunt, whom she had been expecting. The patient seemed to be suffering from exhaustion,

as though she had undergone some *mental shock*. I attended her for a week. Just as she was showing signs of growing better, she sent me a note, dispensing with any further attendance and saying she now felt quite well and would leave town shortly. Two months from that time, as I was passing the church of St. Francis Xavier I saw a woman being half led, half carried from the steps by an elderly lady and the sexton of the church."

Werner touched the ash of his cigar upon a little brass Moorish tray. There was a quiet smile on his face, as he said, inquiringly, "Your patient again?"

"Yes. Since then I have been in constant attendance upon her. She has been at the point of death with brain fever."

"Dangerous illness; in her delirium you learned something of the causes, I presume," said the older physician.

"Yes; a curious story it was, too, and I verified it in a roundabout way by a certain woman, whose name she constantly repeated."

"You found this woman?"

"Yes; she happened to be the wife of an old college mate of mine—Mrs. Motford. The facts of the case are these. When I first attended the young lady, she, instead of having returned from a visit to Boston, as was supposed in the house, had been on board a yacht, and I

judge, had suffered much from exposure in a storm."

"Quite curious," murmured Dr. Werner.

"Her aunt apparently knew nothing of this trip, for from her I learned that since the day I had first attended her, till the morning I saw her on the church steps, she had been in the retreat of a convent."

"Then you told the aunt nothing of your surmises?" asked Werner.

"No, for the girl in her rational moments implored me to say nothing."

"She was conscious that her delirium betrayed her?"

"Evidently."

"Is she a girl of good reputation?" inquired Werner, sceptically.

"Her family is excellent, and her face and manner denote refinement."

"You have your suspicions of the cause?"

"More than suspicion. She has been the victim, I believe unwillingly, of some man's deception."

"I thought so." Werner threw his cigar into the grate. "The convent episode proves it," he said. "They always do that. I believe a woman is better dead than in a convent,—an institution devised by oriental tyranny and fanaticism for ruining the health of women by penning them up. Two classes of women hurl themselves

out of the world through the gates of a convent: the woman with a past, and the woman with no future; one who has suffered through the heart, and one who has never been tempted. It is no virtue to me"—and the doctor lit a fresh cigar,—"to give your life to God because you believe no man wants it. My sister became a nun," Werner continued, gravely. "Oh! if I could only tell you. Poor Mary! poor dear Mary! She found out too late that her idol was clay, mere clay. I beg your pardon." He looked inquiringly at the younger man, who was staring into the fire, made up of small hickory and elder logs. "But you didn't come for this, did you? Go on with your story; it interests me."

"Dr. Werner, if this were all I should not ask your advice. This woman, clever, brilliant, possessing capabilities of a high order, loves or fancies she loves, a hopelessly deformed cripple; a man who seems to me, and I am safe in saying to all men, utterly incapable of being tolerated by any woman! Yet this girl, beautiful, refined, delicate, is in danger of losing her life on his account. A man completely ostracised, not on account of his physical deformities, which are absolutely repellant, but by the deformity of his moral nature. His life is essentially evil. A man who was forced to resign from a club as being too unsavory in reputation for even the society of men about town who, as we know, are not

saints. And yet this woman fell completely in his power. The strange part of it to me is that this man, evidently controlling her as he did, should suffer her to escape from him. Either he is tired of her, or she has profited by his temporary absence to shake off his influence. The case, I think, appeals directly to you, as it deals with the subject of your latest book. This woman, to my mind, has been simply magnetized by a man who, in order to surround himself by the class of people he prefers, both men and women, must possess in a great degree some magnetic power to counteract his deformity, which at first sight is repulsive."

Werner looked at the young practitioner keenly for a moment :

"You think," he said, "it is a case where the latest influence in medical study is revealed. You believe that your patient has been hypnotized?"

"The circumstances otherwise explained would be against nature; in fact, such a woman could not love such a man. There has been a subtle force employed in this affair that few men believe, that I myself have denied till now."

"What do you call love?" asked Werner, after a pause.

"A moral union of tastes, ideas, and thoughts, with a certain healthy, physical affinity that is only attainable when two people see in each other personal attractions. This opinion is universal in

these particulars; that only a combination of moral and physical affinity can constitute pure, honorable love."

"Then, of course, no woman could really love a deformed, immoral monstrosity such as you describe this man," said Werner. "I think your reasoning is good, yet she must have an intensely high strung and susceptible nervous system to become a victim to hypnotic influence such as you have just described. True, I saw a case in point some months ago at a public reception. The man was just such a deformity as you describe, and the girl was a friend of mine—on a visit to New York—a Miss Beale."

"That is the name of my patient," said the young physician, quickly.

"Is it possible!" and Werner rose from his chair as he spoke. "Then I know the man's name—Robert Van Kever."

"The same; how did you know?"

"It was he who first mastered her at the reception, I spoke of. She was just the victim for his deviltry. I never saw a patient so utterly subdued, so perfectly controlled as this young lady then was."

"My visit has not been in vain. You will come and see her?"

"To-morrow, yes," replied Werner, accompanying his friend to the door.

The stars had paled out. A streak of gray was

thrown across the sky. No sound was heard. They seemed alone with the night. Werner looked, with rapt face, on the heavens. The impression of their great, desolate mystery was on his face. Scudder was the first to speak, and his voice jarred on his listener's ears, "Well, good-bye ; until to-morrow."

Werner pointed upward. "How fleet the mystery we call life ! It is ' to-morrow ' now."

CHAPTER XIX.

A LAST CONSULTATION.

DURING three months Margaret slowly, imperceptibly strengthened, and by her side in almost constant attendance was Dr. Werner. It was a great thing to have this famous specialist in such devoted care of her for so long, and would have cost a fortune in an ordinary way, but there was another story gradually weaving its groundwork around the sick bed of the pretty convalescent, now rapidly approaching a complete restoration to health and strength.

Dr. Scudder, only too glad to save his patient (he was young enough to be an idealist), was delighted with the interest his senior took in the matter, and willingly accepted the position of assistant to Werner in the case.

The winter was losing its force, and now and then her power would relax and behind the sky lifting its mantle of hurrying clouds was now and then revealed a clear, warm, brilliant sun which reminded one again of spring. As the days grew milder Margaret fast became stronger, and she was soon able to leave her bed and sit in a chair by the window.

The physicians were both satisfied that she was out of danger, and chancing to meet one day on Broadway they turned off into the quiet of Madison Avenue and walking slowly held their impromptu consultation.

"Her mind received a shock, no doubt," said Werner, "but at her age it would have taken more than a mere strain to disturb her reason. She was young, her mind was active, virile, clear,—depend upon it, this history did not begin with the storm."

"Is it not possible to make the mind believe anything under mesmeric spell?" asked Scudder.

"There is the danger and the good in it. The same force which works for evil could be employed in destroying evil." He paused a moment, then said abruptly:

"You have read my last book?"

Scudder nodded assent.

"Then you know that the faith cure, and the Christian Science treatment are nothing but hyp-

notic influence ; and think what wonders they have created in defiance of medical laws, and all the prescriptions in the world."

Scudder looked at his senior's face in alarm. Was the great promise of his career, and thorough knowledge of medicine to be undermined by views of a by no means orthodox nature?

"Then again, as I said before, Miss Beale was a very young girl ; she had been away from home but little ; she had had no love affair, probably, previous to this attachment."

"Would that be a prejudice in favor of hypnotic influence?" asked Scudder.

"My dear friend, you will no doubt be astonished at my conclusions, but it is my belief that the charm we call love comes at first through magnetic influence and that only the moral force of both the boy and the girl can save them from the dangers of this hypnotic force."

"Then you destroy the word love ; you argue that there is no such thing."

"I argue that purity has its first temptation when love knocks at the heart, and that unless the lovers are each upright in morals, the result is ruin."

"That seems a morbid theory," said Scudder, slowly.

"Yet, angels have fallen ; women whose lives have been models of chastity in every action and

thought, are to be met daily—on the street. Is it not profanity to call such *amours* love? I see no other way of explaining it. It must be that mysterious, dangerous force called hypnotism that can dare convert sacred promptings into shame and despair.”

“Then you are convinced that Miss Beale was hypnotized?”

“Convinced, no; but I will tell you later. You have observed that my treatment has not been a strictly medical one. I have given her only such medicines as would soothe the fever and quiet the delirium. I have aimed at abolishing no nucleus of disease, yet I have been almost constantly by her side.”

“You have watched her untiringly,” replied Scudder.

“Every moment that I have spent in the sick chamber, I have been testing my own hypnotic powers.”

“You?”

“Yes; to counteract an evil influence, I have controlled the illness purely by my own thought. My presence and my mind have absorbed hers, and she has been in a sort of trance for some time, not produced entirely by medicine. I have allowed sufficient time to make the immediate past a blank to her memory, and she will recover herself. Now that she is nearly well, there is a danger that something here in New York may

remind her of this man, and, under all the circumstances, although it would take some time for him to place her under his entire control *now*, it is best that she have change of scene."

"Wonderful—these mind troubles," said Scudder, meditatively.

"I am going to see her this afternoon," continued Werner, "and I shall suggest a trip to Europe with her aunt. A few months abroad would not do me much harm either; this case has been a mental strain. I shall go with them."

"How soon would you go?" asked Scudder.

"I shall make arrangements to leave in a fortnight."

"I agree with you, Werner; it will be the safest course for Miss Beale." The two men separated, and Werner strolled leisurely back to see his patient, while Scudder, strangely wondering at the specialist's new treatment, thought:

"I wonder if he cares for her? Quite possible, and he will cure her with a true and honorable love."

CHAPTER XX.

CHECKMATED.

WHEN Doctor Werner reached the house he was immediately shown upstairs. Mrs. Maitland

held out both her hands to greet him. Margaret was on a couch, tenderly bolstered by pillows and rugs.

"I should have been born a Parsee, for I worship the sun," she said. "I have been following it from my bedroom in here; but it is quite gone now."

"Why not follow it out of doors? Come for a walk with me to-morrow; only a few steps. Won't you?" Dr. Werner asked.

"I don't think I will, thank you; perhaps the day after."

Werner did not press her. She was in a quiet, dreamy mood, so he spent his short visit talking to Mrs. Maitland and they went out together.

"I shall not be long, darling," said Aunt Maitland. But Margaret did not seem to hear her and Werner closed the door softly, saying to her aunt, "She will fall asleep soon."

For once the physician was mistaken, for instead of falling asleep the loneliness aggravated her and she almost wished she had gone with them.

"I cannot be alone like this! If Dr. Werner would only come back," and she looked out of the window—up and down the street, as far as she could see, but no familiar face was in sight. Suddenly a closet door swung open on its hinges.

She saw hanging there her cloak and hat. Ah! how long since she had been out! and slipping into

the wrap, she gathered her loose-caught hair under the hat, and went down the stairs into the street. How strange the people looked to her. Long weeks lay between the sunshine and her. Cabmen called out and beckoned, but she passed into Fifth Avenue, and walked on, nearly staggering with the effort. A desire rose within her to walk by, to look at a place where she had first met a man who was dead now—a man, the memory of whom, and the manner of his death, she felt, would cloud the years left of life for her. It was not far to go, only a few steps more, yet she reeled and caught at the edge of a railing. With dogged perseverance she went on, came to the street, and turned slowly to pass in front of the house. The windows in his room were open and the pale silken curtains, the pattern of which she remembered so well, fluttered in the chill air. Who had the place now? Why was it open like this? She would ask.

As she started to go to the door, a brougham drove up and a servant helped the occupant from it. Margaret turned; a black mist closed in around her; she cried out hoarsely. The man before her was—

Robert Van Kever.

If this meeting was any surprise to Van Kever, his face showed no sign of it.

“Will you come in?” he said, pleasantly.
“Johnson, open the door.”

Margaret, weak and trembling, tried to retrace her footsteps. She swayed as she walked. What did it all mean? the dead alive?

Van Kever called to her, softly. She turned. "I thought you were dead," she faltered. He laughed, and a tinge of latent coarseness lay in the laugh.

"Do I look as if I were dead? I never felt better in my life." And it was for this she had suffered and looked into a grave, only to see it close before her longing eyes. If he knew! Ah! if he knew! No desire to hear the mystery explained was in her mind. Her dead had been brought to life. He was alive! With hesitating feet she quitted him, feeling with each slow step, his eyes upon her. With a hurried order to Johnson, he started after her. As he reached her side, a man turned the corner, and taking in the situation at a glance took Miss Beale's arm, hailed a cab, and without noticing Van Kever, helped her gently but determinedly into it.

"Drive on," he ordered, giving the address.

"Yes, sir!" the driver answered; and the cab startled off.

"Now, sir,"—Werner turned to Van Kever, "I'll talk to you."

"Dr. Werner, I believe. I am—"

"I know perfectly well who you are," Werner interrupted.

"My rooms are here; as you have something

to say to me, had you not better come in?" remarked Van Kever.

Werner followed him up the stairs. When they were in Van Kever's quarters, both were silent until Johnson had left the room.

Werner stood, looking at the shapeless figure before him. On his forehead, thick veins stood out, as though from passion, sternly repressed.

"I have consented to come here, because what I have to say must be between us two. I have known for some time that Miss Beale believed you to be dead. I am her physician, and as such I advised her aunt, Mrs. Maitland, to take her out of the city, in fact, to take her abroad. I intend to accompany them, and we expect to sail next week. A difficulty, I now plainly see, comes up through her meeting with you. I have known for the past few weeks that you were in New York. Now what I have to say to you is this. It is best that you should not try to change our plans, nor to see or communicate with her in any way."

"And why not?" demanded Van Kever; "what right have you to speak to me like this?"

"The right of an honest man, which is more than you have shown yourself to be in this matter."

Van Kever's lips curled into an evil smile.

"I am not aware that you know anything of this 'matter,' as you call it."

"Then I will tell you at once that I know everything. I have given much of my time for weeks to getting at the truth."

His voice, hoarse with suppressed anger, trembled at times into a whisper as he went on.

"I have seen a woman on the verge of death, brought there by you; a woman whom illness alone prevented from throwing away her life in a convent. It was the woman you were just speaking to. You drove her to this."

"I? I drive a woman into a convent?" Van Kever answered, with a loud laugh. "You are certainly under a big misapprehension. I was never an advocate of convents."

"No! I never thought you an advocate of anything that might put a woman beyond your reach. In this case, however, I trust you will be wise enough in the future to look upon Miss Beale as a lady you never knew."

"As to that, sir, I shall, of course, use my own judgment."

"I think not; for, as there is a God above us, rather than see her in your clutches again, I will put every fact in the hands of her family."

"No, you won't," Van Kever replied, "for you love her yourself."

The two men stared at each other. The shaft had struck home. Van Kever had the intuition

of a woman. Women seldom reason, they feel. What Werner had not realized himself, this cunning cripple had felt, had known in an instant.

At last Werner made reply:

"Love," he said, slowly, "has nothing to do with this. I would take the same interest in a bird in the power of a snake."

A knock came at the door, but remained unnoticed:

"I warn you, keep clear of her, or I'll—"

Werner's powerful hand grasped the back of the wheel chair, as though to crush its occupant, and swayed the hunchback backward and forward. The knocking was repeated, and Johnson ran from the inside room to answer it. A boy came in with a note in his hand.

"For Dr. Werner," he said.

Werner's eye caught the writing in an instant. Tearing it open, he read:

"Come at once; say nothing, do nothing, till I see you. I beg of you not to lose one moment.

"MARGARET BEALE."

Putting the note in his pocket, Werner went to the door. With his hand on the knob, he turned and faced Van Kever:

"If you were a *man*, by God! I'd kill you!'

CHAPTER XXI.

LET THE GOOD WOMAN WIN.

"YOU sent for me?" Dr. Werner asked of the woman who stood before him.

One look into his eyes, and Margaret Beale felt that he knew everything. Yet, how could he know? Surely, *he* had not told him. Her eyes dropped to a rug at her feet, as she answered:

"Yes, I sent for you and we have only a few minutes alone. Aunt will be back very soon now." A long pause. "When I left you with him,"—she spoke with an effort,—"I felt as if something dreadful was going to happen. I knew you were angry, for I heard your voice threatening as I drove off after you had put me in the cab. I felt in some way that you blamed him, Mr. Van Kever; he met me in the street, accidentally; we are old friends." Her mouth trembled, and she twisted her handkerchief nervously in her hands.

As Werner watched her, the muscles of his face tightened in agony:

"My dear child," he said, "you cannot blind me to the truth. I knew your secret before I came to you. That was why I came."

She cried out, and stared at him with terror.

stricken eyes. "Aunt Maitland—" she whispered, hoarsely.

"Knows nothing, believe me."

Her face grew crimson, and she looked about as though to escape from the room. He took her hands in his and led her gently to a chair. "I have known for some time that you believed this person to be dead. I knew it from what I gathered from you in your delirium. I knew, too, that he was living; that you were laboring under a delusion."

"You knew?"

"I knew. I think the time has come to tell you that you have been under the domination of a morbid fancy, under a spell; you have never really loved that—man."

Margaret stirred uneasily, and then rose to her feet. Werner continued, without appearing to notice her agitation. "If you were away from him one year, you would loathe him, as I do."

"You misunderstand me; you have no right to—"

"No right! I brought you back from the grave. Does that not give me some slight right to advise you for your good?"

She was silent.

"Miss Beale, how can I put this to you so that you may not be offended, how shall I say it? This man Van Kever has made no effort to

learn where you are, to see you. A man who loves a woman does not so lightly lose her."

She turned from him angrily: "I have said I did not wish to speak of this; it concerns myself only."

"What concerns yourself only, shall not be spoken of; what concerns those who care for you, and love you, shall be. Do me the justice to admit that I am unselfish in this! It breaks my heart to have to speak to you, but if your mother knew—"

"Mother! Mother!" A sob rose to her lips. "She thinks me a saint—"

"And I do, too!" He reached out his hands to her and looked into her quivering face. "And I do, too—a saint, whose divine pity led her from her better self for only a little time. I reverence—I respect you; I want to keep you pure and good, as you are now, pure and good."

"Pure and good?" she faltered.

"Pure and good as you are, and as it rests with you to remain. As surely as I feel your presence in this room, I feel that the man who has given you up once will come back, since he sees you are escaping him. You will not forgive him a second time; your pride in your own dear self should prevent that. My God! can't I impress on you the horror of it all? Promise me that he shall not come here, that you will not see him again before we sail."

"How do I know? How can I tell?" she answered.

"How can you tell! Will you not let the higher spirit triumph? There are two women in you. Will you not let the good woman win?"

She stood before the fireplace, her slender hands clasped together.

"The good woman!" she repeated; "you say these things to comfort me, but in your heart you know you despise me."

"You don't know what you are saying," he cried, turning from her abruptly. She crossed the room, and absently pulled the curtains aside, looking out into the night. The streets were as bright as day, under the electric lamps, and people could be seen as they passed to and fro.

"Come here," she said.

Werner went to her side.

In the street, a woman loitered under a light, her face powdered and colored with glaring cosmetics. She had about her that unmistakable air of a woman of the streets.

"Look at that woman," Margaret said. "Look what she is. Some man made her so, and yet all the men, *he* too, perhaps, jeer at her. I am, to you, on his account, no better than that woman. I know it!"

"Come from that window!" he said, hoarsely, and drew the curtains together. "How dare you compare yourself to that woman! Try and

think of yourself as a woman who has been always good, as your own true natural self. Promise me you will try to think as I ask you. I believe you will be happier for it."

Her head sank forward.

"I am very tired," she said; "I will try, I don't know." She groped her way into the other room, as a child might have done.

"God bless you and keep you. Good night," the doctor murmured after her.

He met Mrs. Maitland in the hallway.

"I learn, my dear Mrs. Maitland," he said, quietly, "that the steamer we intended taking is overcrowded. We shall have to sail four days sooner on the Cunard line."

CHAPTER XXII.

UNDER THE FLASH LIGHT.

As the door swung to from the parting grasp of Werner's nerveful hand, Van Kever sat rigid in his chair, staring at the carpet, his fingers nervously twitching.

His egotistic nature was stung by Werner's words, by his air of defence and proprietorship in regard to Margaret. The thought that some one loved her, that another stood between them, where he had thought no barrier could exist,

aroused his anger ; and then the sight of her pale face, her staggering form, softened him. He was much changed from formerly. The fate which threatened to overtake him was close at hand, he could move only with difficulty now, the sensual expression of his face had changed into a settled sadness, the eyes were almost gentle. Had she forgotten him, he mused, that she was going away from him ? He would be quite alone. She was the last ray of mercy that he had hoped would soothe a terrible end.

No one knew but himself how deeply the words just hurled at him had cut ; how they had struck home, and opened a sensitive wound never healed, always waiting to break out.

The feeling that he was not as other men never lost its keen, wounding effect on him. Reading his letters through, he laid them on a table, upon which lay an evening paper. Picking it up he looked closely at the steamer advertisements, noting carefully the sailing days of the best ships. When he had finished the column, he unconsciously crushed the sheet between his fingers, and then threw it aside, as he murmured :

“ One week left me. In one week she sails.” The words, “ If you were a man, I’d kill you,” came back to him. He moved his chair impatiently to the sofa and threw himself upon its cushions. His lips were set in a determined

way that made straight red lines of them. In his eyes there gleamed a steady, dangerous light ; but his hand shook as he poured brandy into a glass that stood on a table near him, and drank it eagerly. A partial engagement for that evening came to his mind. "Johnson," he called, "you remember hearing Mrs. Grandolph say that she might be up with some people this evening to have their pictures taken here?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to hurry, Johnson, and tell Mrs. Grandolph that it will be quite impossible for me to see them, on account of an important business matter. You can get there before they leave, if you make haste."

Just then there came a faint ripple of laughter along the hall, and a woman's voice said, "Sh!" The very sound conveyed the motion of her hand held warningly to her lips. "May we come in? It was Mrs. Grandolph seeking to surprise him."

A female voice chimed in with Mrs. Grandolph's, saying: "We've come to have our pictures taken."

Behind the ladies came a man.

"How are you, old fellow? They would bring me, you know," the latter said, helplessly.

"Ah, Van Pallen, how are you? I'm sorry for you, but you don't look quite a martyr. Mighty good of you to come up, Mrs. Grandolph," Van Keever answered.

"Johnson bustled around the ladies, taking from them their wraps, as suave and deferential as if he had not just been told to ward them off.

"We met Mr. and Mrs. Motford on the way here, and I insisted on bringing Mrs. Motford with me, said Mrs. Grandolph."

Van Kever looked quizzically at the speaker.

"And *Mr.* Motford?" he asked.

"I think," Mr. Motford's better half replied, quickly, "he went to his club. Poor, dear Mr. Motford, he so seldom has a minute away from me. I can't bear him, though, to get into that horrible habit of going to the club all the time."

"When poor, dear Mr. Grandolph was alive, he seldom went to his club. In fact, he was never happy away from me for a single hour," Mrs. Grandolph said, sadly.

At this, *Mrs.* Motford turned her head slowly until she met Van Kever's eye, when she winked deliberately at him. There was a volume of meaning in that wink.

"*Est-ce qu'elle nous prend pour des betes, nous autres,*" she whispered to Van Kever, fastening a flower in his coat.

"You should have your picture taken just as you look now," said Van Kever. "Van Pallen, will you place the camera in the other room? You'll find it in that closet," with a motion of his hand toward a door near him.

"My picture taken with you?" murmured Mrs. Motford. "What *would* Mr. Motford say?" and she followed Van Pallen, who was carrying the camera into another room.

Mrs. Grandolph turned her head slowly till she met Van Keever's eye, when she winked deliberately. There was a volume of meaning in that wink.

"*Est-ce qu'elle nous prend pour des bêtes, nous autres,*" she whispered in her turn, with an innocent look in her wide open eyes.

Van Keever laughed. Her sense of hearing had been sharpened by years of listening for her errant spouse's belated step.

At last the camera was in position, and the women, dreaming of marvellous poses, huddled together in a corner like sheep, with that dependent look ladies have when slightly embarrassed. Mrs. Motford was the first to speak.

"What shall I do?" she asked.

Van Keever held in his hand a saucer containing some magnesium, ready to be ignited for the purpose of throwing the desired light on the subject of the picture.

"Mrs. Grandolph," he said, "where is that long promised pose of yours—as you looked the first evening you honored me by dining here? Don't you remember how you left us at table, and coming in this very room, threw your-

self in front of the fire on the hearth rug? When we followed you in we found—”

“You found?” Mrs. Grandolph asked, with visible anxiety.

“We found, Mrs. Grandolph, an Oriental beauty lying before the fire, with the reflection of its glow making color upon her face. I remember distinctly how you looked. Come now, be a good girl! You got up that little surprise for me so charmingly, surely you must remember how you did it.”

“I’m so impulsive! I do such mad things,” Mrs. Grandolph said, with a helpless shrug; “it quite escapes me.”

“Make a picture as nearly like it as you can. Do try, now; do your very best.” As the two put their heads together, discussing this matter of the pose, Mrs. Motford came slowly from the bedroom, whither she had retreated some few moments before. Her plump figure was draped in a white silken “portière,” which she had undone from its fastenings, and it clung to her, and swayed with her body as she moved, so deftly was it caught. Mrs. Motford had been known to say that a woman and a paper of pins made a wardrobe in themselves. Across her breast and back the sheer silk was tightly drawn, and shone with a glint, as in an opal, but about her waist it lay in heavy folds. Her full, white throat was ex-

posed and shone whiter than the silk enfolding her. Her sleepy eyes looked through half closed lids. Suddenly she stood motionless in front of the camera, as if made of marble.

“‘The Lotus,’ I should call that picture,” cried Van Kever, and then there was a stillness as the magnesium light flared out over the model. A glow of momentary triumph blazed in her eyes and on her cheeks. She knew that she had shown no small courage before this woman who was looking at her, ready to tear her to pieces for this, for her very loveliness, on the first chance. Little cared she, however, for anything save the triumph of the moment.”

“One more picture, Mrs. Motford,” Van Kever begged of her and Mrs. Grandolph echoed, “Do, dear; that last one was very lovely.”

With a soft smile Mrs. Motford gathered up a tiger-skin rug that lay at her feet. Her hair had fallen down, and its thick brown masses gave a suggestion of a lion’s mane, when the light touched them. She raised her head and her lip curled, as she caught the tiger-skin across her shoulder, and deftly drew back the white drapery from her neck.

“I call this, Mrs. Motford before Cæsar,” she said.

Van Pallen, the artist, was young. His face grew red and his hand trembled, as he took the negative out of the camera. Emboldened by

Mrs. Motford's example, the other woman was gradually awakening to the spirit of posing as a model. At a signal from his master Johnson entered, bringing glasses.

Mrs. Grandolph had by this time slipped into a little eastern gown. She had soft suède boots on her pretty feet as she walked from the camera, with her back to it, and lifted with one hand her skirt. The other held a tiny hour-glass, brought from Egypt to Van Kever, and which had stood on his table. She paused, and looked over her shoulder with a faltering, irresolute expression on her face. The pink and gold of her robe caught a shimmer from the light. A pretty picture this—the hour-glass held up high; the wistful face looking backwards; the sheen and glint of the robe.

"I am a Dresden china 'Fate,'" she said. Van Kever smiled, reached up and took the hour-glass from her.

"Nothing so stern as fate should overtake a lovely Dresden china lady," he said.

"You are quite right," Mrs. Motford interposed. "Nothing should overtake her so stern as fate or time."

"I'll be bound that will make a pretty picture," Van Pallen interposed nervously.

Mrs. Motford dragged a hammock from a corner, and stretched it across the room, on hooks that were driven in the door frames for it. She

seized the palest of the blossoms from the stand and slipped into the hammock. One of her feet was bare, and thrown carelessly over the side.

Van Kever got into the hammock with her. The two were all scattered over with the blossoms.

"Spring-time," this picture is; and they pelted the others with the blossoms until the place looked like a rose garden after a storm, while they were waiting for another subject. Mrs. Grandolph stood by a small table. She had in her hand one of the flowers she had picked up from the floor; the other rested upon a letter lying on the desk. There was a far away look in her eyes, and her lips were slightly parted. "Very lovely," the artist said, and into her eyes there came a mist of tears, as the artificial light died out.

"We'll call that one, 'Waiting,'" Van Pallen suggested.

"You look sad," Van Kever whispered to her, under cover of the chatter. "What is it?"

"Nothing," she said, briefly.

"But there is; tell me," he insisted.

"Well; its very nice to pose, but it's a dreadful trouble to get into one's clothes again."

"Van Pallen and I will go into the dining-room so you two can have this place all to yourselves," and their host promptly retired.

Then there came that peculiar bustling and jar that women make when they are looking for lost

hair-pins, mislaid gloves and other indispensable trifles.

When the guests were gone, Van Kever turned the lights low and threw himself on a couch in his bedroom, as a man who is wearied, bored with life. At any other time such an event in his rooms would have been enjoyed with a keen relish of its bohemian qualities, but to-night through it all he could not forget Margaret's sweet face as he had first seen it, with its sweet, true eyes.

A ray of moonlight brought from the east a stream of glorious white sheen, and in its course through the window to the floor it cast an ugly pallor upon the devil's mask above his head.

"You too mock me," he murmured angrily, tearing it from the wall, and crushing it in his hands. The excitement exhausted him, and he sank back among the cushions, and lay there very still. Before him he could see only one figure, one face.

His punishment had come !

He loved her !

CHAPTER XXIII.

"BON VOYAGE."

FOR three days Van Kever made no effort to see Margaret, who in the meantime had gone

with her aunt to the Hotel Salars, so as to facilitate the preparations for the coming journey.

On the fourth day, he sent a basket of flowers with a note hidden among them to the Hotel Salars. He asked in his note for an answer at once—but none came. In the afternoon he went over himself, and sat in the little reception room while Johnson went to the office to know if the flowers had been delivered and if Miss Beale were in.

"No, she is not here now," the clerk answered him. "She's gone away."

"Where?"

"She left no address here. She went with her aunt."

Johnson felt, in looking at the man, that he was not telling him the truth. He believed she was gone, but he thought if orders had not been given, he could have been told where she was. He went back to Van Kever, who seemed astonished. He made no show of moving for some few minutes. At length he said, "There's but one way to find out where she is. Johnson, we'll go to Lenox," and getting into a cab, the two drove away. As the cab went around the corner, the clerk, who watched them from the window, smiled a subdued, wise smile and then went on about his business.

Meanwhile an old lady in a ward of the New York Hospital was admiring a basket of flowers just presented to her by a certain physician.

"I have made every provision for you while I am away and I am only sorry I do not see you well before leaving, this physician was saying."

"You are very kind." The old lady looked up at the doctor gratefully. "It was thoughtful of you to bring me these flowers."

"Don't thank me for them—thank the one from whom they came."

"She must be good to remember the sick."

"She is."

"Are you sure the interest is altogether on *my* account?" asked the old lady with a smile. "Perhaps you have told her of the friendship between your mother and me."

"Did she send me a message too?" she went on, as her eye fell upon a letter in the basket, and she drew it from among the flowers.

Werner took it from her. "That is not yours, nor mine. It is a mistake, its being there."

He put it in his pocket, and presently took his leave, followed by the tearful blessings of the old lady. Van Kever's flowers had sown their seed in pleasant places.

Once outside the big building, Werner took the letter from his pocket and looked at the direction closely.

"I think I will deliver this when we are so far out on the ocean that the pilot-boat shall have left us." He put it into a leather note-book, and looking at his watch hastened down the street.

* * * * *

In the stuffy, hot little station at Lenox, Van Kever waited while Johnson went outside to hunt up a cab. He grew tired of sitting there, wondering if Miss Atwood would be in, and if so, whether she would tell him where Miss Beale had gone to. He picked up a torn fragment of the morning's paper to while away the minutes till Johnson's return.

The first thing that met his glance was this:

Among the passengers
who sail on the Brit
to-day, will be
Dr. Henry Werner,
Maitland, Mrs.
Miss M. Beale
and Mrs.

It was then two o'clock. The boat left at three.

"How soon does the next train go—back to New York, I mean," he shouted to the station agent.

"Four o'clock, sir!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEARING OF THE END.

*"When sparrows build, and leaves break forth,
My old sorrow wakes and moans."*

THE winter months have drifted by, and spring has come again; spring in New York,

with the opening of the buds and leaves in the park, through which people were driving slowly that the scent in the air and the relief of the green dressed trees might not escape them. One carriage drives even more slowly than the rest, and in it sits a man, looking curiously about him. His face is thin and drawn, and purple rings are underneath his eyes. People stare at him as he goes by. He notices it and gives them quick, sharp glances in return. Coming toward him is a carriage in which sits a mother and her two daughters and beside her, her son. Van Kever straightens up and raises his hat. They are old friends of his family, and of the good old Knickerbocker stock. To his amazement, they look him in the face and leave his bow unnoticed. The son gives him a furtive glance, as much as to say: "Another time, when my sisters are not with me." It meant the cut direct. "Home, home, home!" he called impatiently to the driver. There were others who were pleased enough to know him. A year ago they had been his friends. Ah! but that was a year ago. Since then he had changed. "Hurry, hurry!" he called to the driver. Johnson met him at the door and helped him in. As the day crept on he found he was growing nervous at being left alone. Anything but being left to think in solitude, for, after all, Johnson was only to be counted as a part of himself. Sunday

is a dull day in New York unless one is anxious to pray; so at last he called to Johnson: "Go out and find people! Try Mrs. Motford and whoever she can bring, and stop and look for the other one who comes with her sometimes." Anything but to be left alone!

In an hour or so Johnson returned with every one he could get to come, and the crowd chattered and laughed as crowds had done of old. Only now they talk louder, their laughter is shriller, the women appear to him in a different light. Mrs. Grandolph has married again and gone away. Van Pallen has forsworn the place. Hunter is dropping him quietly but surely. Mrs. Motford, of the many, alone remains. Her bills are paid, and Mr. Motford indulges extravagant tastes. Good, kind-hearted Bertie remains, although the class she is obliged to mix with is—well—*risqué*. They all drink more, too, excepting Van Kever, who since some prudish doctor put a snail-like caution in his head, refuses to drink at all, save perhaps a spoonful of brandy in his *demi-tasse*.

These outcasts of Bohemia resent this moderation on the part of their host.

The cushions with red lights thrown on them, still make backgrounds for women's upturned faces,—but *what* faces! Johnson is wondering what the end will be. Meanwhile, he himself is carefully feathering his nest. Shrewd Johnson!

The women are saying: "*Easter* is here, spring is come," and they wonder about their Easter bonnets and hats. And for this did a man suffer and rise again! Could one of these women comprehend the divine passion! They could once—if Fate hadn't made a slip for them.

It was, they said and say, "all chance, all luck."

Van Kever seldom visits his family now. He tires of them. He has given up his habit of reading Swinburne aloud, though now and then he dwells lovingly on the beauty of "*Faustine*." His "crowd," as he calls it, likes "*Boccacio*" better. Once, in looking over the leaves of *Faustine*, he came across the words: "And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night." He shut the book with a snap. He regrets her; she is the only one he regrets. Mrs. Motford tells him that a year ago he nearly forgot her. "It was quite impossible to find you, your rooms were so often shut up."

"Ah, yes," he answers, "but that was before I realized that there were so many charming women in the world. I was a fool then, I am wise now."

But in his heart he knows that he is the fool now. Still, anything but to be left alone. This living for a frivolous group and one's self, makes up a horrible life—horrible!

If we fling our sacred passions into the gutter,

what must we be ! What have we left ! What are we ! he thinks ; still, *anything* but to be left alone.

He has dismissed his doctor of years' attendance because he tells him the truth, and he knows it *is* the truth. He knows the end is coming, not far off now, and he by his very life is reaching out and bringing it towards him, with his nervous thin hands.

And now he laughs, and mocks and sits up till daybreak and wastes his life—and waits.

Waits for the *living end*.

Once he told Johnson, " If I grow worse I will take this ! " and he showed a pearl handled revolver, such as some men carry, and which he kept locked in a desk ; and he held it up to Johnson's fascinated gaze. " I will take this and make an end of it, before I will become helpless and pitied. " Of course it is doubted by those to whom the story was repeated that he really would do as he threatened. When a man is an atheist and a fatalist, he is sure only of one thing and that is life, and he loves it, and clings to it, for it is all he has.

Meanwhile Van Kever waits.

CHAPTER XXV.

BESIDE THE SUMMER SEA.

HAVE you ever been to Nice in the season?

If you have, then you can understand what magic there was in the languid air, what freedom in the clear blue sky, what strength and power in the far reaching Mediterranean for Margaret Beale.

Dr. Werner had taken them to a great hotel facing the sea and the wonderful promenade that runs almost along the water's edge. Margaret and her aunt have rooms facing the ocean, and the bright sun electrifies the water, and sparkles the rippling white-caps so that the light penetrates their apartments early in the morning and they are obliged to get up almost at sunrise. Then, before hardly any one is about, Margaret will slip on her hat and get as near to the sea as possible, sitting close to it, as a child would who has just come down to the sea-side for a holiday after a long winter in the nursery. She was surprised one morning, deep in these vague meditations which a vast expanse of ocean and sky can alone inspire, by someone placing two hands upon her shoulders while a voice said close to her:

"You'll become a mermaid if you sit so long by the sea."

She looked up, and a bright smile brought the

color to her cheeks ; and taking the speaker's hand she said, simply :

“ Good morning, Doctor.”

Werner took a seat beside her and they sat in silence for some time.

An old flower woman, rheumatic and crippled through long exposure to early dews, no doubt, was passing on her way to a flower-stand. A big basket was on her arm and from beneath a wet cloth peeped her perfumed wares.

“ How lovely !—the first crocuses of the season,” said Margaret.

The old woman stopped, and anxious to sell more than a simple bunch of the spring flowers, pressed among the crocuses a huge bunch of white violets into Margaret's hand. She dropped them in the dust at her feet.

“ Not those,” she said, turning away from the violets and selecting another bunch of crocuses which she fastened in her dress. Werner stooped and picking up one of the white violets placed it in his buttonhole.

“ Why do you do that ? ” asked Margaret, with a troubled look.

“ I am very fond of them,” replied Werner, “ they are bright and sweet.”

Margaret looked at him uneasily for a moment :

“ For my sake, don't wear it, she said, softly.”

“ Why ? ”

"I hate them; they are not half as pretty as the deep blue flower; they are unnatural, untrue."

He detached the flower from his buttonhole and cast it into the air and a gentle breeze whirled it higher and farther away, till Margaret, straining her eyes, could just see it, a dark speck, as it fell at last into the waves. Then she breathed freely.

"The mail last night brought me a paper from home," Werner began.

"Yes?"

"I see," he continued, "that a friend of yours, Mr. Hunter, has made an enormous success, and no end of money, with a book he has written, 'Mr. Brown, of New Jersey.'"

"Indeed, I am glad he has been so fortunate."

"But that is nothing compared with another piece of luck that has befallen him."

"And that?"

"He has become the husband of that charming woman who came to the ship to see you off, Miss Atwood."

"Leda? why you don't mean it! Can it be possible! I never dreamed she would go in for anything so romantic as a love match. She always seemed bent on making, in some way, a success."

"And so she will make a success. So she has already, through her husband."

"Perhaps," Margaret said, slowly, "she loved

him all the time, although she never hinted at it."

"Love is a strange thing. It is a tyrant. It generally wins the day," he answered.

The birds above their heads flew about with straws in their mouths, chattering, scolding, loving.

"Have you ever loved?" Margaret asked, abruptly.

Werner looked at her keenly a moment before answering:

"Why do you ask?" he said.

"Because, I was wondering how much you would care for any one you really loved."

"Men of strong natures love once, and then for a lifetime."

"Tell me," she almost whispered, "do you think *he* loved?"

Werner turned his head aside, and then said:

"No; such nature as his do not know the true meaning of, To Love."

"When I think how well you have made me, she said to him, after a pause, how patient you have been, how thoughtful, what good care you have taken of me, I feel I can't thank you enough."

"Yes, you can!"

"How?"

"Give me the right to take care of you always."

"Oh!" She buried her face in her hands, overcome by something she had never thought of—so out of the range of possibility, it seemed to her.

Just then Mrs. Maitland came bustling up to them, and handed Margaret a package:

"There, dear!" she said, "it came by the mail last night. I forgot to give it to you. No, stay where you are—you two people! I am going for a short, very short little stroll along the boulevard. Thank you; I prefer to be alone. This air makes me feel like a young girl who wants to be alone and think over oh, so many things."

Before Margaret could stop her she was walking briskly away.

She partially undid the wrappings, and amid the folds of tissue paper found a book.

"It is an Easter gift," she said. "It comes from Leda."

It was an illumined text copy of the "Song of Songs," of the Song of Love, which is the Song of Solomon (the sun).

Margaret paused and hesitated before she opened the package entirely.

"Why have you not lifted it out from all that?" pointing to a mass of paper, twine and sealing wax that partly covered it, said Werner.

"Because," she said, "once, some time ago, I put my finger at random on a verse in this song. My eyes were closed then, and I opened

the page blindly. That was long ago, when I was unhappy."

"What was the verse you found?" Werner asked. "Tell me."

She hesitated, and then opened the book and found the verse. She began:

"I sleep, but my *heart* waketh."

Werner took the book and closed it. It was so unlike him—so foreign to his ways, yet he held the volume before her and said:

"It was a year ago or more when you found that verse. Try once more—once again. Come, please open it."

Half wondering she put her hand between two pages of the book, and opening it read: "Set me as a seal upon thy heart."

He took her hand in his, there was no one about, and holding it firmly, tightly, he said:

"I think the time may come—when—" Just then one of the *lazeroni*, who hover about Italian shores, came up to them with his cap off, begging, a smile on his face.

He was a dwarf, his shoulders and chest were misshapen, his arms were long, and hung helplessly over his crutches. The face was hideous, with its unhealthy olive color, and the hair was bushy, black, roughly worn.

The eyes, though, were large, brown, almost gentle.

He mumbled something as he stood in his rags and dirt before them. Margaret started.

Werner frowned at him angrily and waved him aside. As they rose from the seat Margaret drew a coin from her purse and dropped it into his hat.

Would she ever forget those eyes!

That night the moon shone brightly, and Werner sitting alone with Margaret by the sea, repeated the lines: "Set me as a seal upon thy heart," while she with her eyes fastened on the white sails of a yacht gliding near the shore, murmured to herself:—

"But how—oh, teach me to forget! and hope."

AN OLD-TIME EPISODE.

From the French of Théophile Gautier.

BY

J. HEARN.

FIVE hundred years before the Trojan War, there was a grand festival at Sardes. King Candaules was going to marry. Men were gathering in groups in the Agora, upon the steps of the temples and along the porticos.

The road along which the procession was to pass had been strewn with fine yellow sand. Brazen tripods, disposed along the way at regular intervals, sent up to heaven the odorous smoke of cinnamon and spikenard. Myrtle and rose-laurel branches were strewn upon the ground; and from the walls of the palaces were suspended rich tapestries.

Nyssia, daughter of the Satrap Megabazus, was gifted with marvelous purity of feature and perfection of form—at least such was the rumor spread abroad by the female slaves who attended

her, and a few female friends who had accompanied her to the bath ; for no man could boast of knowing aught of Nyssia. No person save one solitary being, who from the time of that encounter had kept his lips firmly closed upon the subject, and that was Gyges, chief of the guards of King Candaules. One day, Gyges had been wandering among the Bactrian Hills, whither his master had sent him upon an important and secret mission ; he was dreaming of the intoxication of omnipotence, of treading upon purple with sandals of gold, of placing the diadem upon the brows of the fairest of women. A bevy of young girls who had been gathering flowers in the meadow, were returning to the city, each carrying her perfumed harvest in the lap of her tunic. Seeing a stranger on horseback, they had hidden their faces in their mantles, after the custom of the barbarians : but at the very moment that Gyges was passing the one whose proud carriage and richer habiliments seemed to designate her the mistress of the little band, a gust of wind carried away the veil of the fair unknown, whirling it through the air like a feather. It was Nyssia, daughter of Megabazus, who found herself thus with face unveiled in the presence of an humble captain of King Candaules's guard. Gyges was stricken motionless at the sight of that Medusa of beauty ; and not till long after the folds of Nyssia's robe had disappeared beyond

the gates of the city could he think of proceeding on his way.

That image, although seen only in the glimpse of a moment, had engraved itself upon his heart. He had endeavored vainly to efface it; for the love which he felt for Nyssia inspired him with a secret terror.

The herald approached with palm-branches in his hands, to announce the arrival of the nuptial cortége, the strong men elbowed their way toward the front ranks; the agile boys, embracing the shafts of the columns, sought to climb up to the capitals and there seat themselves; others succeeded in perching themselves comfortably enough in the Y of some tree-branch; the women lifted their little children upon their shoulders. Those who had the good fortune to dwell on the street along which Candaules and Nyssia were about to pass, leaned over from the summit of their roofs.

The heavy-armed warriors, with cuirasses of bull's-hide covered with overlapping plates of metal, rode behind a line of trumpeters who blew with might and main upon their long tubes. At the head of this troop rode Gyges, the well-named, for his name in the Lydian tongue signifies "beautiful."

After the battalion, commanded by Gyges, came young boys, crowned with myrtle-wreaths, singing epithalamic hymns, after the Lydian manner,

accompanying themselves upon lyres of ivory. They preceded the gift-bearers—strong slaves, whose half-nude bodies exposed to view such interlacements of muscle as the stoutest athletes might have envied. Ethiopians—whose bodies shone like jet, and whose temples were tightly bound with cords, lest they should burst the veins of their foreheads in the effort to uphold their burden—carried, in great pomp, a colossal statue of Hercules, the ancestor of Candaules, wrought of ivory and gold. Camels and dromedaries, splendidly caparisoned, with musicians, seated on their necks, carried the gilded stakes, the cords, and the material of the tent designed for the use of the queen during voyages and hunting-parties.

At last Candaules appeared, riding in a chariot drawn by four horses, as beautiful and spirited as those of the sun. Candaules was a young man full of vigor, and well worthy of his Herculean origin. His head was joined to his shoulders by a neck massive as a bull's; his hair, black and lustrous, twisted itself into rebellious little curls, here and there concealing the circlet of his diadem; his ears, small and upright, were of a ruddy hue, his forehead was broad and full though a little low, like all antique foreheads; his eyes, full of gentle melancholy, his oval cheeks, his chin, with its regular curves, his mouth, with its slightly parted lips—all bespoke the nature of the poet rather than that of the

warrior. He preferred building palaces, after plans suggested by himself to the architects, who always found the king's hints of no small value; or to form collections of statues and paintings by artists of the elder and later schools. It is even said that Candaules had not disdained to wield, with his own royal hands, the chisel of the sculptor and the sponge of the encaustic painter.

Nyssia, the daughter of Megabazus, was mounted upon an elephant. His tusks and his trunk were encircled with silver rings, and around the pillars of his limbs were entwined necklaces of enormous pearls. Upon his back, which was covered with a magnificent Persian carpet of striped pattern, stood a sort of estrade, overlaid with gold, finely chased, and constellated with onyx stones, carnelians, chrysolites, lapis lazuli, and girasols; upon this sat the young queen, so covered with precious stones as to dazzle the eyes of the beholders. She was clad in a robe embroidered by Syrian workmen, with shining designs of golden foliage and diamond-fruits, and over this she wore the short tunic of Persepolis, which hardly descended to the knee. But, alas! a saffron-covered *flammeum* pitilessly masked the face of Nyssia.

Candaules had vainly begged of her to lay aside her veil; even for that solemn occasion. The barbarian maiden had refused to pay the welcome of her beauty to his people. Great was

the disappointment, and Gyges sighed when he beheld Nyssia, after having made her elephant kneel down, descend upon the inclined heads of Damascus slaves, as upon a living ladder, to the threshold of the royal dwelling.

Nyssia was really far superior to her reputation for beauty, great as it was. Candaules had not even suspected the existence of such perfection. Privileged as a husband to enjoy fully the contemplation of her beauty, he found himself dazzled, giddy, like one who fixes his eyes upon the sun; he felt himself seized with the delirium of possession, like a priest drunk with the god who fills and moves him. His happiness transformed itself into ecstasy and his love into madness. At times, his very felicity terrified him. He felt as if it were a shame thus to hoard up for himself alone so rich a treasure—to steal this marvel from the world.

Candaules's felicity was too great for him, and the strength which he would doubtless have found at his command in time of misfortune was wanting to him in time of happiness. In exasperation of his enthusiasm for Nyssia, he had reached the point of desiring that she were less modest, for it cost him no little effort to retain in his own breast the secret of such wondrous beauty.

"Ah," he would murmur to himself, "how strange a lot is mine! I am wretched because of

that which would make any other husband happy. Nyssia will not leave the shadow of the *gynæceum*, and refuses, with barbarian modesty, to lift her veil in the presence of any other than myself. Alas! to think that such beauty is not immortal, and that years will alter those divine outlines—that poem whose strophes are contours, and which no one in the world has ever read or may ever read save myself. If I knew even, by imitating the play of light and shadow, with the aid of lines and colors, how to fix upon wood a reflection of that celestial face—if marble were not rebellious to my chisel—how well would I fashion, in the purest vein of Paros or Pentelicus, an image of that charming body. And long after, when deep below the slime of deluges and the dust of ruined cities, the men of future ages should find a fragment of that petrified shadow of Nyssia, they would cry: ‘Behold, how the women of this vanished world were formed!’ And they would erect a temple wherein to enshrine the divine fragment. Sole adorer of an unknown divinity, I possess no power to spread her worship through the world!”

Thus in Candaules had the enthusiasm of the artist extinguished the jealousy of the lover. If, in place of Nyssia, daughter of the Satrap Megabazus, all imbued with Oriental ideas, he had espoused some Greek girl from Athens or Corinth, he would certainly have invited to his court the

most skilful painters and sculptors, and have given them the queen for their model. Such a whim would have encountered no opposition from a woman of the land where even the most chaste made a boast of having contributed—some for the back, some for the bosom—to the perfection of a famous statue. But hardly would the bashful Nyssia consent to unveil herself in the discreet shadow of the *thalamus*, and the earnest prayers of the king shocked her rather than gave her pleasure.

The sentiment of duty and obedience alone induced her to yield at times to what she styled the whims of Candaules. Sometimes he besought her to allow her hair to flow over her shoulders in a river of gold richer than the Pacloius; to encircle her brow with a crown of ivy and linden-leaves, like a bacchante of Mount Mænalus; to lie, hardly veiled by a cloud of tissue finer than woven wind, upon a tiger-skin, with silver claws and ruby eyes; or to stand erect in a great shell of mother-of-pearl, with a dew of pearls falling from her tresses in lieu of drops of sea-water. When he had placed himself in the best position for observation, he became absorbed in silent contemplation; his hand, tracing vague contours in the air, seemed to be sketching the outlines for some picture; and he would have remained thus for whole hours, if Nyssia, soon becoming weary of her rôle of model, had not reminded

him, in chill and disdainful tones, that such amusements were unworthy of royal majesty and contrary to the holy laws of matrimony. "It is thus," she would exclaim, as she withdrew, draped to her very eyes, into the most mysterious recesses of her apartment, "that one treats a mistress—not a virtuous woman of noble blood!"

These wise remonstrances did not cure Candaules, whose passion augmented in inverse ratio to the coldness shown him by the queen. And it had at last brought him to that point that he could no longer keep the chaste secrets of his beautiful bride. A confidant became necessary to him. He did not fix his choice upon some crabbed philosopher of frowning mien, but Gyges, whose reputation for gallantry caused him to be regarded as a connoisseur in regard to women.

One evening he laid his hand upon his shoulder, in a more than ordinarily familiar and cordial manner, and, after giving him a look of peculiar significance, he suddenly strode away from the group of courtiers, saying in a loud voice: "Gyges, come and give me your opinion in regard to my effigy, which the Sicyon sculptors have just finished chiseling on the genealogical bas-relief where the deeds of my ancestors are celebrated."

Candaules and his favorite traversed several halls and finally arrived at a remote portion of the ancient palace. This portion of the palace

formed a sort of court, surrounded by a portico. In the midst thereof sat Hercules upon a throne, with the upper part of his body uncovered and his feet resting upon a stool, according to the rite for the representation of divine personages. On the right of the throne were Alcæus, son of the hero and of Omphale; Ninus, Belus, Argon, the earlier kings of the dynasty of the Heracleidæ; then all the line of intermediate kings, terminating with Ardys, Alyattes, Meles—or Myrsus—father of Candaules, and finally Candaules himself. By a singular chance, the statue of Candaules occupied the last available place at the right hand of Hercules—the dynastic circle was closed.

Candaules, whose arm still rested on the shoulder of Gyges, walked slowly round the portico in silence.

“What would you do, Gyges,” said Candaules, at last breaking the silence, “if you were a diver, and should bring up from the green bosom of the ocean a pearl of incomparable purity and lustre, and of worth so vast as to exhaust the richest treasures of the earth?”

“I would inclose it,” answered Gyges, a little surprised at this brusque question, “in a cedar box, overlaid with plates of brass, and I would bury it under a detached rock in some desert place; and, from time to time, when I should feel assured that none could see me, I would go thither to contemplate my precious jewel and

admire the colors of the sky mingling with its nacreous tints."

"And I," replied Candaules, his eyes illuminated with enthusiasm, "if I possessed so rich a gem, I would enshrine it in my diadem, that I might exhibit it freely to the eyes of all men in the pure light of the sun."

Gyges listened with astonishment to this discourse. The king appeared to be in a state of extraordinary excitement.

"Well, Gyges," continued Candaules, without appearing to notice the uneasiness of his favorite, "I am that diver. Amid this dark ocean of humanity, wherein confusedly move so many defective or misshapen human beings, I have found beauty, pure, radiant, without spot, without flaw—a form which no painter or sculptor has ever been able to translate upon canvas or into marble—I have found Nyssia!"

"Although the queen has the timid modesty of the women of the Orient, and no man, save her husband, has ever beheld her features, fame, hundred-tongued and hundred-eared, has celebrated her praise throughout the world," answered Gyges, respectfully inclining his head.

"Mere vague insignificant rumors. They say of her, as of all women not actually ugly, that she is more beautiful than Aphrodite or Helen; but no person could form even the most remote idea of such perfection. In vain have I besought

Nyssia to appear unveiled at some public festival or to show herself for an instant leaning over the royal terrace. She would never consent to that. Now, there is one strange thing, which I blush to acknowledge even to you, dear Gyges: formerly I was jealous; I wished to conceal my amours from all eyes—no shadow was thick enough, no mystery sufficiently impenetrable. Now I have the feelings neither of a lover nor a husband; my love has melted in adoration, like thin wax in a fiery brazier. All petty feelings of jealousy or possession have vanished. No; I wish that some friendly eye could share my happiness, and, like a severe judge to whom a picture is shown, recognize after careful examination that it is irreproachable. Yes, often do I feel myself tempted to tear off with rash hand those odious veils; but Nyssia, in her fierce modesty, would never forgive me. And still I cannot alone endure such felicity; I must have a confidant for my ecstasies—and it shall be none other than you!"

Having uttered these words, Candaules brusquely turned and disappeared through a secret passage. Gyges, left thus alone, could not but notice the peculiar concourse of events which seemed to place him always in Nyssia's path. A chance had enabled him to behold her beauty; among many princes and satraps she had chosen to espouse Candaules, the very king he served;

and through some strange caprice, which he could regard only as fateful, this king had just made him, Gyges, his confidant in regard to the mysterious creature whom none else had approached, and absolutely sought to complete the work of Boreas on the plain of Bactria !

* * * * *

On the following day, Candaules again took Gyges aside and continued the conversation begun under the portico of the Heracleidæ. Having freed himself from the embarrassment of broaching the subject, he freely unbosomed himself to his confidant. Gyges listened to all these bursts of praise with the slightly constrained air of one who is yet uncertain whether his interlocutor is not feigning an enthusiasm more ardent than he actually feels, in order to provoke a confidence naturally cautious to utter itself.

Candaules at last said to him, in a tone of disappointment: "I see, Gyges, that you do not believe me; you think I am boasting, or have allowed myself to be fascinated, like some clumsy laborer, by a robust country girl on whose cheeks Hygeia has crushed the gross hues of health. No! by all the gods! I have collected within my home, like a living bouquet, the fairest flowers of Asia and of Greece. I know all that the art of sculptors and painters has produced. Linus, Orpheus, Homer, have taught me harmony and rhythm. I do not look about me with

love's bandage blindfolding my eyes. I judge of all things coolly. The passions of youth never influence my admiration, and when I am withered, decrepit, wrinkled, my opinion will be still the same. But I forgive your incredulity and want of sympathy. In order to understand me fully, it is necessary that you should see Nyssia in the radiant brilliancy of her shining whiteness—free from jealous drapery—even as nature with her own hands molded her. This evening I will hide you in a corner of the bridal-chamber—you shall see her!”

“Sire! what do you ask of me?” returned the young warrior, with respectful firmness; “how shall I, from the depths of my dust, dare to raise my eyes to this sun of perfections, at the risk of remaining blind for the rest of my life. Have pity on your humble slave, and do not compel him to an action so contrary to the maxims of virtue—no man should look upon what does not belong to him.”

“Listen, Gyges,” returned Candaules; “fear nothing. I pledge my royal word that no evil shall befall you. I shall hide you in such a way that Nyssia will never know she has been seen by any one except her royal husband.”

Being unable to offer any further defence, Gyges made a sign of submission to the king's will. He had made all the resistance in his power.

“Come, Gyges,” said Candaules, taking him by

the hand, "let us make profit of the time. Nyssia is walking in the garden with her women; let us look at the place, and plan our stratagem for this evening."

The king took his confidant by the hand and led him along the winding ways which conducted to the nuptial apartment, and, bidding Gyges place himself against the wall, turned back one of the folding doors upon him in such a way as to hide him completely; yet the door did not fit so perfectly to its frame of oaken beams that the young warrior could not obtain a distinct view of the chamber interior.

Facing the entrance, the royal bed stood upon an estrade of several steps. Along the walls, at regular intervals, stood tall statues of black basalt, in the constrained attitudes of Egyptian art, each sustaining in its hand a bronze torch into which a splinter of resinous wood had been fitted. An onyx lamp, suspended by a chain of silver, hung from the ceiling. Near by stood an arm-chair, inlaid with silver and ivory, upon which Nyssia hung her garments.

"I am generally the first to retire," observed Candaules, "and I always leave this door open as it is now; Nyssia, who invariably has some tapestry flower to finish, or some order to give her women, usually delays a little in joining me; but at last she comes, and slowly takes off—one by one, as though the effort cost her dearly—and

lays upon that ivory chair all those draperies and tunics which by day envelope her like mummy-bandages. From your hiding-place you will be able to follow all her graceful movements, admire her unrivalled charms, and judge for yourself whether Candaules be a young fool, prone to vain boasting. or whether he does not really possess the richest pearl of beauty that ever adorned a diadem."

"Oh, king, I can well believe your words without such proof as this," replied Gyges.

"When she has laid aside her garments," continued Candaules, without heeding the exclamation of his confidant, "she will come to lie down. You must take advantage of the moment to steal away, for in passing from the chair to the bed she turns her back to the door. The vestibule is all in darkness, and the feeble rays of the only lamp which remains burning do not penetrate beyond the threshold of the chamber. Nyssia cannot possibly see you, and to-morrow there will be some one in the world who can comprehend my ecstasies. But see, the day is almost spent; return to your hiding-place, Gyges, and though the hours of waiting may seem long, I swear by Eros of the Golden Arrows that you will not regret having waited."

After this assurance, Candaules left Gyges again hidden behind the door. The hour approached, and Gyges felt his heart beat faster,

and the pulsation of his arteries quicken. He even felt a strong impulse to steal away before the arrival of the queen, and, after averring subsequently to Candaules that he had remained, abandon himself confidently to the most extravagant eulogiums. He felt a strong repugnance to obey the royal command. The husband's complicity rendered this theft more odious, in a certain sense, and he would have preferred to owe to any other circumstances the happiness of beholding the marvel of Asia in her nocturnal toilet.

In the midst of these reflections, Candaules entered the chamber and exclaimed, in a low voice, as he passed the door: "Patience, my poor Gyges, Nyssia will soon come."

When he saw that he could no longer retreat, Gyges forgot every other consideration and no longer thought of aught save the happiness of feasting his eyes upon the charming spectacle which Candaules was about to offer him. One cannot demand from a captain of twenty-five the austerity of a hoary philosopher.

At last, a low whispering of raiment, sweeping and trailing over marble, announced the approach of the queen. With a step as cadenced and rhythmic as an ode, she crossed the threshold of the thalamus, and the wind of her veil, with its floating folds, almost touched the burning cheek of Gyges.

Nyssia advanced to the ivory chair and commenced to detach the golden pins which fastened her veil upon her head, and Gyges, from the depths of the shadow-filled angle where he stood concealed, could examine, at his ease, the proud and charming face, of which he had before obtained only a hurried glimpse; that rounded neck, at once delicate and powerful, whereon Aphrodite had traced, with the nail of her little finger, those three faint lines, which are still known as the "necklace of Venus;" that white nape, on whose alabaster surface little wild rebellious curls were disporting and entwining themselves; those silver shoulders, half-rising from the opening of the chlamys, like the moon's disk emerging from an opaque cloud. Candaules, half-reclining upon his cushions, gazed with fondness upon his wife, and thought to himself: "Now, Gyges, who is so cold, so difficult to please, and so sceptical, must be already half-convinced."

Opening a little coffer, the queen freed her beautiful arms from the weight of the bracelets and jewelry. Then with the movement of a dove trembling in the snow of its feathers, she shook her hair, which being no longer held by the golden pins, rolled down in languid spirals like hyacinth flowers over her back and bosom—thus she remained for a few moments before reassembling the scattered curls and finally reuniting

them into one mass. Having thus arranged her coiffure, she seated herself upon the edge of the ivory foot-stool and commenced to untie the little bands which fastened her buskins.

Gyges, lost in contemplation, though all the while fully comprehending the madness of Candaules, said to himself that had the gods bestowed such a treasure upon him he would have known how to keep it to himself.

Nyssia detached the cameo which fastened the peplum upon her shoulder—there remained only the tunic to let fall. Gyges, behind the door, felt his heart beat so violently that he feared it must make itself heard in the chamber—and when Nyssia, with a movement of careless grace, unfastened the girdle of her tunic, he thought his knees would give way beneath him. Nyssia—was it an instinctive presentiment, or was her skin, virginally pure from profane looks, so delicately magnetic in its susceptibility that it could feel the rays of a passionate eye, though that eye was invisible? Nyssia hesitated to strip herself of that tunic, the last rampart of her modesty. Twice or thrice her shoulders, her bosom, and bare arms shuddered with a nervous chill, as though an insolent lip had dared to touch them in the darkness.

At last, seeming to nerve herself for a sudden resolve, she doffed the tunic in its turn—and the white poem of her divine body suddenly ap-

peared in all its splendor. Shuddering with pleasure the light glided and gloated over those exquisite forms, and covered them with timid kisses.

Candaules smiled in proud satisfaction. With a rapid step—as though ashamed of being so beautiful—Nyssia approached the bed, her arms folded upon her bosom; but with a sudden movement she turned round before taking her place upon the couch beside her royal spouse, and beheld through the aperture of the door a gleaming eye.

A cry, like that of a fawn who receives an arrow in her flank, was on the point of bursting from her lips, yet she found strength to control herself and lay down beside Candaules, cold as a serpent, with the violets of death upon her cheeks and lips. Not a muscle of her limbs quivered, not a fibre of her body palpitated, and soon her slow, regular breathing seemed to indicate that Morpheus had distilled his poppy juice upon her eyelids.

She had divined and comprehended all.

* * * * *

The next morning, Candaules caused Gyges to be summoned, and conducted him to the court of Heracleidæ.

“Well, Gyges,” he said to him, with laughing mien, “I did not deceive you when I assured you you would not regret having passed a few hours

behind that blessed door. Am I right? Do you know of any living woman more beautiful than the queen? If you know of any superior to her, tell me so frankly, and go bear her in my name, this string of pearls, the symbol of power."

"Sire," replied Gyges, in a voice trembling with emotion, "no human creature is worthy to compare with Nyssia; it is not the pearl fillet of queens which should adorn her brows, but only the starry crown of the immortals."

"I well knew that your ice must melt at last in the fires of that sun. Now you can comprehend my passion, my delirium. Is it not true, Gyges, that the heart of a man is not great enough to contain such a love? It must overflow and diffuse itself."

A hot blush overspread the cheeks of Gyges, who now but too well comprehended the admiration of Candaules. The king noticed it and said, with a manner half-smiling, half-serious: "My poor friend, do not commit the folly of becoming enamored of Nyssia. You would lose your pains; it is a statue which I have enabled you to see, not a woman. I have allowed you to read some stanzas of a beautiful poem, whereof I alone possess the manuscript, merely for the purpose of having your opinion, that is all."

"You have no need, sire, to remind me of my nothingness. Sometimes the humblest slave is visited in his slumbers by some radiant and

lovely vision, with ideal forms, nacreous flesh, ambrosial hair. I have dreamed with open eyes—you are the god who sent me that dream.”

“Now,” continued the king, “it will scarcely be necessary for me to enjoin silence upon you. If you do not keep a seal upon your lips you might learn to your cost that Nyssia is not as forgiving as she is beautiful.” And the king waved his hand in token of farewell to his confidant, and retired.

Candaules had scarcely disappeared when a woman, wrapped in a long mantle so as to leave but one of her eyes exposed, came forth from the shadow of a column behind which she had kept herself hidden during the conversation, walked straight to Gyges, placed her finger upon his shoulder, and made a sign to him to follow her.

Followed by Gyges, she paused before a little door, of which she raised the latch by pulling a silver ring attached to a leathern strap, and commenced to ascend a stairway, with rather high steps, contrived in the thickness of the wall. At the head of the stairway was a second door, which she opened with a key wrought of ivory and brass. As soon as Gyges entered, she disappeared without any further explanation in regard to what was expected of him.

The curiosity of Gyges was mingled with uneasiness; he could form no idea as to the signifi-

cance of this mysterious message. He had a vague fancy that he could recognize in the silent messenger one of Nyssia's women and the way by which she had made him follow her, led to the queen's apartments. He asked himself, in terror, whether he had been perceived in his hiding-place or betrayed by Candaules, for both suppositions seemed probable. But the door had been fastened upon him and all escape was cut off; then he advanced into the chamber, which was shadowed by heavy, purple hangings, and found himself face to face with Nyssia. He thought he beheld a statue rise before him, such was her pallor. The hues of life had abandoned her face; a feeble rose-tint alone animated her lips; on her tender temples a few almost imperceptible veins intercrossed their azure network; tears had swollen her eyelids, and left shining furrows upon the down of her cheeks; the chrysoprase tints of her eyes had lost their intensity. She was even more beautiful and touching thus. Sorrow had given soul to her marmorean beauty. Her disordered robe, scarcely fastened to her shoulders, left visible her beautiful bare arms, her throat, and the commencement of her death-white bosom.

She walked straight to Gyges, and fixing upon him an imperial look, clear and commanding:

"Do not lie," she said to him, in a quick, abrupt voice; "seek no vain subterfuges; have

at least the dignity and courage of your crime ; I know all. I saw you ! Not a word of excuse ; I would not listen to it. Candaules himself concealed you behind the door. Is it not so the thing happened ? And you fancy, doubtless, that it is all over ? Unhappily, I am not a Greek woman, pliant to the whims of artists and voluptuaries. Nyssia will not serve for any one's toy. There are now two men, one of whom is a man too much upon the earth—he must disappear from it ! Unless he die, I cannot live. It will be either you or Candaules ; I leave you master of the choice. Kill him, avenge me, and win by that murder both my hand and the throne of Lydia, or else shall a prompt death henceforth prevent you from beholding, through a cowardly complaisance, what you have not the right to look upon. He who commanded is more culpable than he who only obeyed ; and, moreover, should you become my husband, no one will have ever seen me without having the right to do so. But make your decision at once, for two of those four eyes in which my nudity has reflected itself must, before this very evening, be forever extinguished."

This strange alternative, proposed with a terrible coolness, with an immutable resolution, so utterly surprised Gyges, who was expecting reproaches, menaces, and a violent scene, that he remained for several minutes without color and

without voice, livid as a shade on the shores of the black rivers of hell.

“I!—to dip my hands in the blood of my master! Is it indeed you, O queen, who demand of me so great a penalty? I comprehend all your anger, I feel it to be just, and it was not my fault that this outrage took place. But you know that kings are mighty; they descend from a divine race. Our destinies repose on their august knees, and it is not we, feeble mortals, who can hesitate at their commands. By your feet that I kiss, by the hem of your robe, which I touch as a suppliant, be clement! Forget this injury, which is known to none, and which shall remain eternally buried in darkness and silence. Candaules worships you, admires you, and his fault springs only from an excess of love.”

“Were you addressing a sphinx of granite in the arid sands of Egypt, you would have more chance of melting her. A heart of brass dwells in this marble breast of mine. Die or kill! When the sunbeam which has passed through the curtains shall touch the foot of this table, let your choice have been made. I wait.”

And Nyssia crossed her arms upon her breast in an attitude replete with sombre majesty.

“The shadowy depths of Hades are visited by none with pleasure,” answered Gyges; “each man has the instinct of self-preservation; and,

since blood must flow, let it be rather from the veins of another than from mine."

"It is well," replied Nyssia; "here is the means of execution." And she drew from her bosom a Bactrian poniard. "This blade is not made of brass, but with iron difficult to work, tempered with flame and water, so that Hephaistos himself could not forge one more keenly pointed or finely edged. It would pierce, like thin papyrus, metal cuirasses and bucklers of dragon's skin. The time shall be while he slumbers. Let him sleep and wake no more!"

Her accomplice, Gyges, hearkened to her words with stupefaction; for he had never thought he could find such resolution in a woman who could not bring herself to lift her veil.

"The ambuscade shall be laid in the very same place where the infamous one concealed you in order to expose me to your gaze. At the approach of night I shall turn back one of the folding-doors upon you, undress myself, lie down; and when he shall be asleep I will give you a signal. Above all things, let there be no hesitancy, no feebleness; and take heed that your hand tremble not when the moment shall have come! And now, for fear lest you might change your mind, I propose to make sure of your person until the fatal hour—you might attempt to escape—to forewarn your master; do not think to do so!"

Nyssia whistled in a peculiar way, and immediately from behind a Persian tapestry, embroidered with flowers, there appeared four monsters, swarthy, clad in robes diagonally striped, which left visible arms muscled and gnarled as trunks of oaks; their thick protruding lips, the gold rings which they wore through their nostrils, their great teeth, sharp as the fangs of wolves, the expression of stupid servility on their faces, rendered them hideous to behold. The queen pronounced some words in a language unknown to Gyges, and the four slaves rushed upon the young man, seized him, and carried him away, even as a nurse might carry off a child in the folds of her robe. Gyges passed the remainder of the day there in a state of cruel anxiety; accusing the Hours of being lame, and again of walking too speedily. The crime which he was about to commit—although he was yielding only to an irresistible influence—presented itself to his mind in the most sombre colors.

At last night fell upon the city and the palace. A light footstep became audible; a veiled woman entered the room, and conducted him through the obscure corridors. The hand which held that of Gyges was cold, soft, and small; nevertheless, those slender fingers clasped it with a bruising force, as the fingers of some statue of brass animated by a prodigy would have done; the rigidity of an inflexible will betrayed itself

in that ever-equal pressure as of a vice. Gyges—conquered, subjugated, crushed—yielded to that imperious traction as though he were borne along by the mighty arm of Fate. No word was exchanged between the sinister couple on the way from the prison to the nuptial chamber.

The queen placed Gyges behind the folding-door as Candaules had done the evening previous. Yesterday, it was the turn of Candaules; to-day, it was that of Nyssia; and Gyges, accomplice in the injury, was also accomplice in the penalty. The daughter of Megabazus seemed to feel a savage joy, a ferocious pleasure, in employing only the same means chosen by the Lydian king, and turning to account for the murder those very precautions which had been adopted for voluptuous phantasy.

“You will again this evening see me take off these garments, which are so displeasing to Candaules. This spectacle should become wearisome to you,” said the queen, in accents of bitter irony, as she stood on the threshold of the chamber; “you will end by finding me ugly.” And a sardonic, forced laugh momentarily curled her pale mouth; then, regaining her impassible severity of mien, she continued: “Do not imagine you will be able to steal away this time, as you did before; you know my sight is piercing. At the slightest movement on your part, I shall awake Candaules; and you know that it will not be easy for you to

explain what you are doing in the king's apartments, behind a door with a poniard in your hand. Further, my Bactrian slaves—the copper-colored mutes who imprisoned you a short time ago—guard all the issues of the palace, with orders to massacre you should you attempt to go out. Therefore, let no vain scruples of fidelity cause you to hesitate. Think that I will make you King of Sardes, and that I will love you if you avenge me. The blood of Candaules will be your purple, and his death will make for you a place by my side.”

In a short time Candaules arrived. He seemed pleased to find that Nyssia had already retired to the nuptial-chamber.

“The trade of embroidery, and spindles, and needles seems not to have the same attraction for you to-day as usual,” said he.

“My lord, I felt somewhat tired this evening, and so came down-stairs sooner than usual. Would you not like, before going to sleep, to drink a cup of black Samian wine mixed with the honey of Hymettus?” And she poured from a golden urn into a cup of the same metal, the sombre-colored beverage which she had mingled with the soporific juice of the nepenthe.

Candaules took the cup by both handles and drained it to the last drop, but the young Heraclid had a strong head, and sinking his elbows into the cushions of his couch, he watched Nyssia

undressing without any sign that the dust of sleep was commencing to gather upon his eyes.

As on the evening before, Nyssia unfastened her hair and permitted its rich blonde waves to ripple over her shoulders. From his hiding-place, Gyges fancied that he saw those locks slowly becoming suffused with tawny tints, illuminated with reflections of blood and flame, and their heavy curls seemed to lengthen with viperine undulations, like the hair of Gorgons and Medusas. All simple and graceful as that action was in itself, it took from the terrible events about to transpire a frightful and ominous character, which caused the hidden assassin to shudder with horror.

Nyssia then unfastened her bracelets, but, agitated as her hands had been by nervous strain, they ill-served her will. She broke the string of a bracelet of beads of amber, inlaid with gold, which rolled over the floor with a loud noise, causing Candaules to reopen his gradually closing eyes. Each one of those beads fell upon the heart of Gyges as a drop of molten lead falls upon water.

Having unlaced her buskins, the queen threw her upper tunic over the back of an ivory chair. This drapery, thus arranged, produced upon Gyges the effect of those sinister-folding winding sheets wherein the dead were wrapped before

being borne to the funeral pyre. Every object in that room, which had the evening before seemed to him one scene of smiling splendor, now appeared to him livid, dim, and menacing. The statues of basalt rolled their eyes and smiled hideously. The lamp flickered weirdly, and its flame dishevelled itself in red and sanguine rays, like the crest of a comet; far back in the dimly lighted corners loomed the monstrous forms of the Lares and Lemures. The mantles hanging from their hooks seemed animated by a factitious life, and assumed a human aspect of vitality; and when Nyssia, stripped of her last garment, approached the bed, all white and naked as a shade, he thought that Death herself had broken the diamond fetters wherewith Hercules of old enchained her at the gates of Hell when he delivered Alcestes, and had come in person to take possession of Candaules.

Overcome by the power of the nepenthe-juice, the king at last slumbered. Nyssia made a sign for Gyges to come forth from his retreat, and laying her finger upon the breast of the victim, she directed upon her accomplice a look so humid, so lustrous, that Gyges, maddened and fascinated, sprang from his hiding-place like the tiger from the summit of the rock where it has been crouching, traversed the chamber at a bound, and plunged the Bactrian poniard to the very hilt in the heart of the descendant of Hercules. The

chastity of Nyssia was avenged and the dream of Gyges accomplished.

Thus ended the dynasty of the Heracleidæ, after having endured for five hundred and five years, and commenced that of the Mermnades, in the person of Gyges, son of Dascylus.

THE END.







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